

ABSTRACT

TITLE OF THESIS: The Rise and Fall of John McCone

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The head of the Intelligence Community (IC) has an undefined role in the development of U.S. foreign policy. This leads to a problem whether the head of the IC should be a policy advocate or policy neutral. Each method has its problems. Historically, the heads of the IC have strived to remain policy neutral. When a head tries to be a policy advocate it has only led to disastrous results. The research question asked was how should the head of the IC be involved with the development of U.S. foreign policy?

John A. McCone, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) from 1961 to 1965 was one IC head that chose to be a policy advocate. During his tenure as DCI, Mr. McCone interjected his views on policy with policymakers of the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Administrations. Centered on the debates of Vietnam War policy, DCI McCone advocated a position that was at odds with other policymakers. While policymakers sought a policy to contain U.S. involvement, DCI McCone advocated an expansive approach to the conflict. As a result, he lost influence and damaged the credibility of the IC.

This thesis traced DCI McCone's role in policy development during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Using primary source documentation, a thorough analysis was made of DCI McCone's role in the policy debates on Vietnam. This research finds that DCI McCone overstepped his role as head of the IC. DCI McCone was a constant critic of administration policy towards the Vietnam War. This only served to undermine his position with policymakers. At the same time, the IC provided objective analysis questioning the optimistic assessment of policymakers. With DCI McCone's position undermined it carried over to the IC. Before 1965, policymakers chose to ignore intelligence assessments that contradicted their own assessment.

DCI McCone's performance in policy formulation serves as a warning to today's IC professional. IC professionals that attempt to become an assertive policy advocate will in the end be marginalized. This will not only have a negative effect on their influence but will be detrimental for the IC as a whole.

THE RISE AND FALL OF JOHN MCCONE

by

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NDIC Class 2008

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and
do not reflect the official policy or position of the
Department of Defense or the U.S. Government

DEDICATION

To (b)(6)

To (b)(6) for his help and the chance to work with him back at Fort Lewis, Washington.

To my family (b)(6) who have put up with me for the last 10 years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THESIS OVERVIEW

Topic

One of the most difficult positions to fill in United States national security is the head of the Intelligence Community (IC). In this position the head of the IC stands at the nexus of intelligence and policymaking. In that role the head of the IC must determine what level of involvement he or she will have with foreign policy formulation. The Director can either be a policy advocate or remain policy neutral.

Throughout the history of the IC, there have been examples of the head of the IC performing either one or both of these roles. Historically, intelligence leaders who are policy advocates become isolated by other members of the national security apparatus within an administration. As a result of the Director's isolation, the IC suffers, since the analysis provided is often discarded by policymakers.

Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) John A. McCone was an example of a DCI being a policy advocate. John McCone served as DCI from 1961 to 1965, spanning the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. DCI McCone interjected himself into the foreign policy debates of both administrations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role played by DCI McCone in foreign policy formulation within both

of these administrations and determine the effects of his involvement on intelligence matters.

Today's IC professional should study the case of DCI McCone. With the recent establishment of the Director for National Intelligence (DNI), strong leadership is a necessary quality. The DNI also needs to find his or her proper role in policy debates within the administration they are supporting. The example of DCI McCone shows that if the DNI overreaches in policy debates, the effects will ripple throughout the IC. Not only will the DNI loose influence but also the IC. The case of DCI McCone should stand as a sober reminder to IC professionals as to what happens when the head of the IC looses influence.

Research Question

The Issue. At the senior levels of government, intelligence professionals face two dilemmas when it comes to the support they provide for U.S. foreign policy goals. Intelligence professionals can either be a policy advocate or policy neutral. Each approach has its own risks for the intelligence professional. Whether the IC professional fully embraces the policy or openly dissents, they may be accused of manipulating intelligence to support their own position. If they remain neutral, they provide unbiased reports on the problems with the policy but may be accused of offering nothing constructive to remedy the situation. Intelligence professionals during the Vietnam War faced these dilemmas.

The early 1960's was a turbulent time for the IC and DCI McCone. Coming into office as DCI in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961, DCI McCone had to

work to regain the confidence and trust for national intelligence by senior officials serving in the John F. Kennedy Administration. John McCone was at the heart of several foreign policy formulation debates that affected the nation as a whole including the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the proper U.S. role in Vietnam from 1963 to 1965.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone showed a tendency to become involved with policy formulation, arguing his point not only to other members of the National Security Council but to the President directly. While the Cuban Missile Crisis was short lived, it did illustrate the methods DCI McCone used to insert himself in policy debates. These methods came to light during the debates leading up to the decision by Lyndon Johnson to commit large U.S. military forces to defend South Vietnam in the summer of 1965.

While working to regain the confidence of senior political officials, DCI McCone, with the backing from the IC, became heavily involved in the policy debate on the correct course of action for Vietnam. From 1961-1965, the IC produced over 40 national and special intelligence estimates on the situation in Vietnam. The estimates were generally pessimistic and argued that policies of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations of gradual escalatory violence against the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnam were not succeeding. Competing against these national intelligence estimates were positive reports from the State and Defense Departments, as well as senior U.S. officials in Vietnam, such as the U.S. Ambassador and U.S. military commanders, that the current policies were succeeding. Leading the intelligence side of the debate was DCI McCone.

Throughout the escalatory period from 1961-1965, John McCone consistently argued that the current policy of a gradual escalation against North Vietnam could not

succeed and a more aggressive approach was needed. As John McCone was advocating for a new policy, he influenced Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analysts to provide analysis to support his position in the debate. In the end, President Johnson chose “to take the appraisal of the situation from his Secretary of Defense and his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs rather than the appraisal of the intelligence analysts.”¹ Marginalized, DCI McCone resigned in April 1965, unable to stop policymakers from adopting a policy that only led to a stalemate in Vietnam.

The Research Question. How should the head of the IC be involved with the development of U.S. foreign policy?

The Hypothesis and the Key Questions

The Hypothesis. As a policy advocate, DCI John McCone lost his ability to be an effective leader of the Intelligence Community during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

Key Questions. The following key questions will help answer the research question.

1. Did DCI McCone undermine the IC by providing his own analysis or pressuring analysts to change theirs?
2. Did DCI McCone attempt to sway intelligence analysis to support his position if at odds with accepted policy?

¹ John McCone, “Conversations with History,” Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley,” <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/McCone/mccone-con0.html> (accessed October 9, 2007). Hereafter cited as John McCone, Berkley interview.

3. Was his position undermined by other policymakers within the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson?

4. Was his relationship with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson undermined by his own actions?

Related Literature

Introduction. The literature of the Vietnam Era, from primary and secondary sources, covers in great detail the policy debates Kennedy and Johnson administration officials had on the course to follow. Most of the literature focuses primarily on the operational side of the debate; the role intelligence played is discussed from either former intelligence officials or from scholars who focused on intelligence. DCI McCone's role is unique. DCI McCone was a big believer in keeping a written record and many of the memorandums he wrote on specific topics or a summarization of a meeting he participated in are captured in the U.S. Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series. While DCI McCone wrote extensively of his involvement, he never wrote a memoir to capture his experience. In many of the secondary sourced literature that focus on Vietnam policy development, DCI McCone makes sporadic appearances; however, the literature does consistently cover one dramatic appearance. DCI McCone is regularly quoted, during April 1965, arguing against the policy of a gradual escalation of force against North Vietnam. DCI McCone argued for a more aggressive approach and prophesized that the current path would lead to failure. Most of the literature on the April 1965 DCI McCone episode present it as a sign that the policy

the U.S. followed was destined to fail; however, none of the literature provide any analysis on the outcome if the U.S. followed DCI McCone's recommended path.

Primary sources used for this thesis are memorandums and notes, compiled in the *FRUS*, written by officials who participated in the policy debates of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Further primary sources are books and journal articles that give a more detailed examination of DCI McCone's role in the policy debate. Secondary sources are works written by historians who studied the Vietnam War. Although these works do not discuss in detail DCI McCone's role, they place the policy debates in their historical context. These works also give an objective view, removed from the passion of participants, of the Vietnam War.

Primary Sources. One inherent problem in focusing on intelligence-related material and the role it played in foreign policy formulation is the classification issue. Many of the key intelligence participants wrote memoirs during that time. Two principal advisors under DCI McCone wrote memoirs. Richard Helms² wrote *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* and William Colby³ wrote *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA*. The issue with their accounts is that most of the material they cover is generic, with many of the details needed to support their case still classified, at the time of publication of their memoirs.

² Richard Helms was a career employee of the CIA who rose to the position of DCI (1967 – 1973). Under DCI McCone, Mr. Helms served as Deputy Director for Plans at CIA. In 1966 Mr. Helms became Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

³ William Colby was DCI McCone's principal assistant for Vietnam-related issues. From 1959-1962, Mr. Colby was Chief of Station in Saigon, South Vietnam. From 1962 to 1968, Mr. Colby served as head of the CIA's Far East Division. From 1973 to 1976, Mr. Colby served as DCI.

Most primary information from DCI McCone is compiled in the *FRUS*. Mr. McCone provided one oral interview as part of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library oral history project. The interview given by DCI McCone was conducted in 1972 and only covered topics at a superficial level. Most of the interview examined the relationship DCI McCone had with President Johnson and only gives a broad brush discussion of the CIA's role in Vietnam. The Lyndon B. Johnson Library also captured interviews with other key members of the national security apparatus, such as McGeorge Bundy,⁴ Clifford Clark,⁵ and Robert McNamara.⁶ The roles of Mr. Bundy and Mr. McNamara are the most important as they interacted the most with DCI McCone on policy debates.

The *FRUS* used for this thesis covered the period 1961-1965. The *FRUS* provides good information on policy development for Vietnam during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. The *FRUS* also includes a volume focused specifically on each administration's management of the IC. Many of Mr. McCone's memorandums are a part of these series. At times, DCI McCone's view of events did not reflect other policymakers' views of the same situation. For example, the *FRUS* has memorandums of meetings written by officials within the White House and then includes DCI McCone's memorandum discussing the same meeting. While the White House version downplayed the role DCI McCone had in the meeting, DCI McCone's version leaves the impression he was the central figure in the meeting. Many of these memorandums provide his

⁴ McGeorge Bundy served as the National Security Advisor for both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, from 1961-1966. Mr. Bundy played a key role in Vietnam policy formulation.

⁵ Clark Clifford was a senior policy advisor for several Democratic administrations going back to the administration of President Harry S. Truman. Under President Kennedy, Mr. Clifford served as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board from 1961 and as its chairman from 1963. In 1968, Mr. Clifford served as Secretary of Defense under President Johnson.

⁶ Robert McNamara, in time, became the most dominant Vietnam policy advisor for both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Under both, he served as Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968.

perspective on policy debates as well as his recollections of meetings with senior leaders, such as Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and President Lyndon Johnson.

The Central Intelligence Agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence has added the only accounts that examine Vietnam from the intelligence perspective. In recent years, the CIA declassified all national intelligence estimates related to Vietnam, from 1948 until 1975, and published it as *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*. Although the collection is unabridged, there is no background commentary to put each estimate into its historical context. Also, the unabridged collection does not show the evolution of each estimate from draft to finished product. This source will be used to examine how DCI McCone presented intelligence estimates to policymakers. It will also be used to determine if DCI McCone accurately reflected the assessments of analysts.

Harold P. Ford's *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962-1968*, looks at the intelligence and policy interface during the Vietnam War. While not the central thesis of his book, DCI McCone's role is examined extensively. Mr. Ford is critical of policymakers, arguing that the policymaker ignored intelligence that pointed at the weakness of the accepted policy. Mr. Ford examines three episodes in the Vietnam debate. The first covers the distortion in intelligence reporting, focusing on the rewrite of National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 53-63. The second episode covers the events from 1963 to 1965 that led to President Johnson's decision to commit to an open ended involvement in South Vietnam. The final episode covering the Tet Offensive will not be utilized as it is outside the scope of this thesis. The first two episodes provide information on DCI McCone's role. In the first episode, Mr. Ford gives a critical view of DCI McCone's intervention in the rewriting of NIE 53-63 to reflect the positive outlook

of policymakers. The second episode examines DCI McCone's evolving view of policy and how he argued his policy position with policymakers within the Johnson Administration. On a whole, Mr. Ford is more critical of actions by policymakers than the actions of DCI McCone.

David Robarge's *John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence 1961-1965* is the only all encompassing biography of the tenure of DCI McCone. Mr. Robarge gives a sympathetic view of DCI McCone's tenure. Although his focus is on the management of the IC under DCI McCone, Mr. Robarge does cover the role DCI McCone played in foreign policy formulation. In his discussion, Mr. Robarge presents an image of DCI McCone trying to do the right thing in terms of swaying policymakers to follow a different policy. Mr. Robarge also examines how DCI McCone's personality affected his relationship with other policymakers.

Kenneth J. Campbell's article "John A. McCone: An Outsider Becomes DCI," from the *Studies in Intelligence* was written in 1988. His article is a very uncritical view of DCI McCone, arguing that the success of DCI McCone clearly shows that someone without intelligence experience can succeed as head of the IC. Mr. Campbell also views DCI McCone's role in policy matters as a way to sway policymakers in finding the correct path. Mr. Campbell faults the policymakers, not DCI McCone, for the breakdown between the IC and the policymakers. The one problem with this source is the uncritical examination of DCI McCone's tenure. This source will be used alongside Mr. Robarge's account to examine in depth DCI McCone's tenure.

John Helgerson's book *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates* examines the role the CIA played during the transition between presidents. Chapter three of his book

covers the Kennedy and Johnson period. During the transition to President Johnson, Mr. Helgerson examines not only that transition but also how DCI McCone and the IC suffered under President Johnson's lack of interest in intelligence. According to Mr. Helgerson, the problems about Vietnam caused the rupture between the IC and the President. Further Mr. Helgerson shows that DCI McCone overreached in his relationship with President Johnson, providing him advice that clearly President Johnson did not want to hear. This source will be used to examine how DCI McCone handled the transition to President Johnson. One weakness of the account is that Mr. Helgerson attempts to cover the working relationship between both men in a very short section. It only gives a broad overview of the relationship.

Robert McNamara's *In Retrospect The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* presents the policymaker's side of the argument. Mr. McNamara, looking back on his experience during this time expressed remorse for blindly following a policy that was doomed to fail. He does discuss the break with DCI McCone and although he agreed that DCI McCone's recommendations had its merits, the fear of a wider war, bringing in China, eventually led to it being discarded. One problem with using Mr. McNamara's account is that he wrote his memoir to explain the mistakes made during the Vietnam War. All episodes discussed are from the viewpoint of why the United States should not have done that way. Mr. McNamara does not present his argument from the perspective from when he was there serving as Secretary of Defense. As he was the lead policymaker for the Vietnam War, Secretary McNamara's account demonstrates how he dealt with DCI McCone's policy involvement.

Lyndon Johnson's *The Vantage Point Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969*, only covers the period up to 1965 in two chapters. He presents his relationship with DCI McCone as proper and not the candid advice seeking that others thought the president asked for. President Johnson goes out of his way to explain the reasoning for following the path of the gradual escalation in Vietnam. In the end, President Johnson came to rely on the advice of Robert McNamara to the detriment of the opinions of others around him, namely DCI McCone. The account in his memoirs on the policy discussion on Vietnam from the years 1963-1965 are superficially covered. It was at this time he was building the Great Society program and the Vietnam war was secondary. It was only after 1965 does President Johnson devote more attention to Vietnam. However even in his discussions on the Vietnam War, President Johnson attempts to explain away his decision often pointing to other advisors, like Secretary McNamara, who were the lead agent on Vietnam policy. This source will be used to determine how President Johnson viewed DCI McCone's policy recommendations.

Secondary Sources. Beyond the account of those who directly participated in Vietnam policy debates are other works that sought to take into account the whole time period and not just Washington D.C. In books such as Fredrik Logevall's *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* and Robert Mann's *A Grand Delusion America's Descent into Vietnam*, both authors show how senior officials blindly followed a policy towards conducting the war in Vietnam. Whether policymakers were blinded by an anti-communist view of the world or fear of escalating the war to bring in China or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) the U.S.

failed to achieve success in Vietnam. Each succeeding debate further added to the problem and entangled the U.S. in a quagmire. The issue with finding good quality secondary sources is the lack of attention they give to intelligence-related matters that focus on the years 1961 to 1965. Intelligence did not play a key role in policy development up to 1965. Intelligence plays more of an account after 1965, specifically with issues like the Tet Offensive in 1968, where the use of intelligence was more hotly debated.

Research Design

Research Design. The research design used for this thesis was the historicism method. This method places more importance on using primary source documentation to understand the thoughts and actions of participants in policy debates than on using the long-term view of secondary sources. This method provided for the proper examination of DCI McCone's role in foreign policy formulation as well as the interaction he had with other key individuals. While the head of the IC does have a foreign policy role in terms of the conduct and management of covert actions, the role he played in actual policy debate is undefined. DCI McCone followed his own interpretation for this role.

Data Collection Strategy. This thesis utilized archival research. The U.S. Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series provided the best unclassified primary source documents related to Vietnam. Although these documents do not provide context, the use of the memoirs of key participants plus Mr. Robarge's biography of DCI McCone filled in the context. Supporting the memoirs were the

objective analysis done by researchers, who took a long-term view of Vietnam and how policymakers fumbled into Vietnam.

Analytical Strategy. My analytical strategy first examined the model DCI McCone established for the role intelligence played in policy debates and how that vision translated throughout the IC. Then based off that model, I determined whether DCI McCone followed it in the foreign policy formulation debates of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

Thesis Classification. The focus of the thesis remained at the unclassified level. Since the early 1990's, information pertaining to discussions within the Kennedy and Johnson Administration became available through the declassification process. This information was compiled in the *FRUS*. These documents open a window into the policy debates at the time. For intelligence-specific material, in the late 1990's, the CIA declassified all intelligence estimates written about the Vietnam War. These estimates covered the period 1948 to 1975. The availability of declassified information made it possible to write an unclassified thesis, with sufficient detail, to examine DCI McCone's role.

Chapter Overview

Chapter two will examine DCI McCone's role in policy formulation in the Kennedy Administration from 1961-1962. There were two focus areas. The first area covers DCI McCone taking over as head of the IC and how he understood his role to be

with regards to foreign policy formulation. The second area covers DCI McCone's involvement in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the event that opened the door for him to exert more influence in the policy arena.

Chapter three examines DCI McCone's role in Vietnam policy during the last year of the Kennedy administration, 1963. Two key events highlight DCI McCone's involvement. The first was his directed rewrite of NIE 53-63 against the advice of his analysts. The second event was the role DCI McCone played in the debate on the fate of President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. While the policymakers rejected the findings of the NIE and tainted the value of IC analysis on Vietnam, DCI McCone's advocacy against a coup in South Vietnam started the process of his isolation.

Chapter four examines the role played by DCI McCone in the Lyndon Johnson Administration. The first part of the chapter covers a brief comparison of the leadership styles of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. The second part of the chapter examines DCI McCone's evolving view on the right policy to follow, which covered the years 1963 to 1965. In 1965, DCI McCone settled on a policy solution, a large scale, sustained air campaign against North Vietnam, and advocated that position until the end of his tenure as DCI.

Chapter five examines the difficulties the head of the IC has today. This chapter specifically addresses DCI George Tenet's role for operations in Afghanistan and in the 2002-2003 Iraq War Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) debate. This chapter also examines the similarities and differences on problems faced by DCI Tenet and DCI McCone in their dealings with policymakers. In the end both became isolated within the administrations they served.

Chapter six reexamines the research question and hypothesis posed for this thesis. It next focuses on the key questions asked at the beginning and summarizes their conclusions. Based off key findings, this chapter makes several recommendations for the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to follow in order to effectively work with policymakers. It also examines how IC analysis could be ignored if the DNI loses influence.

BACKGROUND ON JOHN MCCONE

Biographical Overview

John McCone was born on January 4, 1902. His life spanned the emergence of the United States as a world power. Prior to World War II, Mr. McCone worked in the steel industry. When World War II started, he shifted his focus to support the war effort. During World War II, he led his corporation, the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation,⁷ in the building of ships and other war essential items. Following the conclusion of the war, Mr. McCone entered public service. Mr. McCone served in all administrations, from Harry S. Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, in one capacity or another.

In 1947, President Truman appointed him to the commission looking at the role a future air force would have in United States national security. Mr. McCone “wrote the military recommendations in the report, which became one of the key documents”⁸ for officials in the new Defense Department seeking to increase military spending on

⁷ David Robarge, *John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence 1961-1965*, (Washington D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005), 10.

⁸ David Robarge, 13.

airpower. Following his work on the commission, Mr. McCone went to work for Secretary of Defense James Forrestal as the Special Assistant Deputy to Secretary of Defense in the newly established Department of Defense. In this role, Mr. McCone completed the first consolidated budget for the U.S. military. He was also responsible for implementing the provisions of the National Security Act of 1947 with respect to Defense Department operations.⁹

In 1949, after serving with Secretary Forrestal for several months, Mr. McCone returned to the private sector resuming his role in shipbuilding. However this stint in the private sector was short lived, as President Truman appointed him as Undersecretary of the Air Force in 1950. Although Mr. McCone served as the Undersecretary for only one year, he accomplished a great deal. During this time, Mr. McCone “familiarized [himself] with intelligence processes, bureaucracies, and personalities.”¹⁰ Alongside immersing himself in the details of national security, Mr. McCone’s leadership traits were first exposed. Mr. McCone intimidated his subordinates and he “treated high ranking officers with contempt.”¹¹ He expected the highest standards of those who worked for him and refused to accept failure.¹² In 1951, Mr. McCone returned to his shipbuilding business again but remained active in policy formulation as “U.S. policymakers continued to seek his advice.”¹³ In the midst of the Korean War (1950-1953), Mr. McCone was called again to serve the public interest. In 1952, Mr. McCone

⁹ David Robarge, 13.

¹⁰ David Robarge, 14.

¹¹ David Robarge, 14.

¹² David Robarge, 14.

¹³ David Robarge, 15.

conducted a tour of air facilities in Korea. Based on his analysis, he “recommended more rigorous training for American personnel,”¹⁴ to assist in the U.S. prosecution of the Korean War.

During the Dwight Eisenhower Administration, Mr. McCone remained active in the formulation of policy while holding no official position. Mr. McCone, a staunch Republican helped in President Eisenhower’s 1952 election campaign. President Eisenhower trusted the advice Mr. McCone offered. That trust allowed Mr. McCone to have open access to President Eisenhower. Mr. McCone was a frequent visitor to the White House holding private meetings “in the presidential residence.”¹⁵ From his extensive knowledge base of national security, “administration leaders solicited his counsel on defense reorganization, the military budget and dealings with European leaders.”¹⁶

In 1954, Mr. McCone accepted a position on the Department of State’s Public Committee on Personnel.¹⁷ On this commission he focused on the need to break down the barriers between the career diplomats and the bureaucrats in Washington.¹⁸ Highlighting his businessman skills he forced through a method that integrated the two career services. In 1958, Mr. McCone returned to formal public service with his appointment as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC).

¹⁴ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁵ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁶ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁷ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁸ David Robarge, 15.

The role he played as Chairman of the AEC foreshadowed his role as DCI. From his involvement in policy formulation, his management of a large organization in the federal government, and his dealings with peers “greatly influenced how he would direct the IC in the early 1960s.”¹⁹ He arrived at an organization that was demoralized and spent some time rebuilding its morale. He then engaged in an intense policy debate that ended up having him isolated within a presidential administration. Further, many of the challenges McCone faced as DCI he encountered as Chairman of the AEC. Much like the DCI, the Chairman of the AEC’s authority “cut across traditional departmental lines, forcing him to carefully coordinate and negotiate most of the Commission’s important decisions.”²⁰

It was during the debate on implementing a nuclear test ban that Mr. McCone openly expressed opposition to an approved policy. In opposing the stated desires of the Eisenhower Administration of concluding a nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union, Mr. McCone ended up isolating himself within the administration. As a result of the heated debate within the administration, President Eisenhower “start[ed] to distrust McCone.”²¹ President Eisenhower viewed McCone as an advocate for the nuclear industry and not the administration. Having lost the policy debate within the administration, McCone concluded his term at the AEC with no further participation in policy debates. In January 1961 John Kennedy was inaugurated as President of the United States and Mr. McCone returned again to his shipbuilding business.

¹⁹ David Robarge, 16.

²⁰ David Robarge, 19.

²¹ David Robarge, 25.

Nine months later, Mr. McCone, a lifelong Republican, returned to public life accepting the position of DCI in John F. Kennedy's Administration. After the failure of the CIA backed invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro forces in April 1961, the President wanted new leadership at the head of CIA. The choice of John McCone was a surprise. Mr. McCone did not know President Kennedy and knew very few members of his administration.²² President Kennedy wanted a proven manager to take over the CIA. John McCone fit that requirement. However, President Kennedy kept the decision from other members of his administration, fearing that if the information was known beforehand, the "liberal s.o.b.'s [in the administration]...they'd destroy you before I can get you confirmed."²³ In September 1961, Mr. McCone joined the Kennedy Administration as DCI.

McCone's View of DCI's Role in Policymaking

In the time prior to becoming DCI, John McCone was involved in policymaking, whether working in the Defense Department or as head of the AEC. Even while not holding office he still advised senior administration officials, to include President Dwight Eisenhower, on policy matters. When Mr. McCone assumed the position of DCI, he had to fundamentally alter the way he saw his role in policymaking. DCI McCone had to reconcile his past experiences as a policy advocate into a position that required neutrality.

Mr. McCone recognized the dilemma faced by a DCI. If the DCI was a policy advocate he "may unconsciously skew his production of intelligence to support policies

²² John McCone, Berkeley interview.

²³ John McCone, Berkeley interview.

which he espouses.”²⁴ Mr. McCone saw “no conflict during his tenure as DCI in his own fulfillment of both functions, believing that he could ‘shift gears’ mentally and emotionally.”²⁵ In an interview given after his time as DCI, Mr. McCone summed up his role as DCI in policy formulation with the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Describing his role in policy formulation his function was focused on

...provid[ing] intelligence and it was up to the President and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to make the decisions. Now occasionally the President would call upon me for my personal judgment on a policy decision and when I would give it I would qualify it by saying that doing so it was beyond my competence as Director of Central Intelligence. In other words, I didn’t want to get in the position where somebody might suspect that our intelligence reports were slanted because I might have a particular personal view on a policy matter.²⁶

DCI McCone presented the ideal situation for how the head of the IC should work with other policymakers in foreign policy formulation. The records, during his time as DCI, showed that DCI McCone did not follow his own advice and upon reflection after his time as DCI, Mr. McCone readily admits that “he involved himself in policy more than he should have.”²⁷ Mr. McCone provided unsolicited advice to policymakers and became directly engaged in policy debates. Even his subordinates recognized the real role DCI McCone played in policy formulation. Richard Helms, serving as his Deputy Director for Plans in CIA, commented on DCI McCone’s role. According to Mr. Helms, DCI

²⁴ Kenneth J. Campbell, “John A. McCone: An Outsider Becomes DCI,” *Studies in Intelligence* (Summer 1988): 52.

²⁵ Kenneth J. Campbell, 52.

²⁶ John A. McCone, interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, August 19, 1970, Oral History Collection, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, 28. Hereafter cited as John McCone, oral interview.

²⁷ Kenneth J. Campbell, 52.

McCone “considered his role as DCI to fall within the circle of policymaking, and took an active role in both the Kennedy and early Johnson eras.”²⁸

In order for DCI McCone to get involved in the policy debate required the analytical support from the CIA and the Office of National Estimate (ONE). While these elements provided the analysis for U.S. policy towards Vietnam, at times, DCI McCone relied on his own analysis of events to back up his advocacy. William Colby, the CIA lead for Vietnam, observed Mr. McCone’s use of his own analysis.

I don’t think it was the analyst; it was John McCone largely. I mean, McCone had the courage of his convictions. He’d say things that were pretty far out, but he would say them as recommendations. His estimates would be well-founded. He would use the analysts very well for their estimates, but he’d make his judgments about what we ought to do. That was his business, not [the analysts].²⁹

The combination of Mr. McCone’s involvement with policy formulation as an advocate and relying on his own estimates of the situation was detrimental not only to the IC but also to his ability to be an influential figure within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

²⁸ Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 306.

²⁹ William Colby, second interview conducted by Ted Gittinger, March 1, 1982, Oral History Collection, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, 11.

CHAPTER 2

JOINING THE POLICY DEBATE, 1961 - 1962

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on two events that define DCI McCone's role in asserting his authority over the IC and his initial foray as a policy advocate that would come to dominate his tenure as DCI. The first is the steps DCI McCone needed to take to assert his authority over the IC. Since the inception of the IC in 1947, DCI McCone was the first individual with little or no experience with intelligence-related matters. His nomination by President John Kennedy in 1961, replacing Allen Dulles,³⁰ was not well received within the administration or IC. The years 1961 through 1962, DCI McCone worked to assert his control over the IC.

The second area this chapter examines is the role DCI McCone played during the Cuban Missile Crisis. During the summer and fall of 1962, DCI McCone asserted himself within the foreign policy establishment. DCI McCone participated in all the debates within the Kennedy Administration, advocating a hard line against the Soviets. At the conclusion of the crisis, DCI McCone found his voice in the policy debate but also exposed himself to the challenges of being a policy advocate.

³⁰ Allen Dulles served as DCI from 1953-1961. Dulles was one of the few Eisenhower appointments to carry over into the Kennedy Administration.

TAKING CHARGE OF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Nomination and Resistance

John McCone was not John Kennedy's first choice for Director of Central Intelligence, but he needed John McCone. Reeling from the fallout from the Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961, President Kennedy looked to change national intelligence leadership. At the time, President Kennedy decided to remove long-time DCI Allen Dulles and looked for someone who could better manage the IC. Before settling on John McCone, President Kennedy offered the position of DCI to several influential members of the foreign policy establishment, like Clark Clifford, before being persuaded by his brother, Robert Kennedy, to offer the job to John McCone.³¹ Robert Kennedy wanted "movers and doers and activists, men who could cut through the...bureaucracy."³² John McCone fit that requirement.

DCI McCone's appointment offered President Kennedy several positive outcomes. First, John McCone was a proven administrator, and in the view of President Kennedy, the CIA needed an administrator to repair and better manage the Agency.³³ Second, John McCone's appointment elevated the position of DCI above partisan politics. In appointing a conservative Republican in a liberal Democratic administration, DCI McCone shielded President Kennedy from criticism from the political right.³⁴

³¹ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 152. Hereafter cited as David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*.

³² David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 153.

³³ Kenneth J. Campbell, 50.

³⁴ Kenneth J. Campbell, 50.

While DCI McCone solved some of President Kennedy's immediate problems, his nomination was not well received by members within the Kennedy Administration. DCI McCone was appointed on September 27, 1961, but the furor of his nomination began almost immediately. On September 28, 1961, McGeorge Bundy, President Kennedy's National Security Advisor, wrote about the problems DCI McCone's nomination caused.

The McCone appointment is the big news here. I, for one, underestimated the strength of the opposition in the second and third levels of CIA and State. It appears that most of the people involved in intelligence estimates on atomic energy matters thought McCone was highly prejudiced. He also had a reputation, in these circles, as an 'operator' whose loyalty to Administration policy was doubtful. So there is a significant problem in working out a pattern of strong cooperation and support for him.³⁵

Another factor generating opposition to DCI McCone's nomination was his role in policymaking. There was a concern that DCI McCone might fail to understand his new role of neutrality. In all his past government positions, DCI McCone was a policy advocate. To his critics, the belief was that the CIA needed "a professional manager and technician rather [than] a policy-oriented advocate."³⁶ This concern was shared by senior leaders in the CIA, wondering whether John McCone would "have the objectivity to maintain relatively unbiased national intelligence estimates."³⁷

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "91. Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Kennedy," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyj/xxv/6008.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008). Subsequent citation of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* will be shortened to *FRUS* with appropriate volume annotated.

³⁶ David Robarge, 31.

³⁷ Kenneth J. Campbell, 50.

Overcoming Resistance

During the first few months as DCI, John McCone had two pressing challenges to overcome. The first was a combination of restoring the morale of the CIA as well as building trust and confidence of his subordinates in his leadership. The second challenge was expanding the role and responsibility of the DCI, specifically ensuring that the DCI was the principal intelligence officer for the President. In both instances, Mr. McCone was largely successful.

Initial apprehension within CIA to McCone becoming DCI was quickly dissipated by his administrative abilities and his refocusing of CIA's priorities. Prior to McCone assuming the position of DCI, the CIA primarily focused on clandestine operations. DCI McCone shifted that priority away from clandestine operations and towards the analytical operations of the Agency. His focus on the analysis aspect of the Agency was made with the intent of it becoming the "best possible so it would have the maximum influence on policymakers."³⁸

His subordinates were won over by his tough leadership style. Richard Helms, reflecting on DCI McCone's directorship stated that "[DCI] McCone turned out to have been exactly the right man to replace Allen Dulles."³⁹ He further elaborated on the impact DCI McCone had on the CIA.

McCone was another example of a man who might have stepped straight from central casting in Hollywood. His white hair, ruddy cheek, brisk gait, impeccable dark suits, rimless glasses, aloof manner, and unmistakable self-confidence were the profile of a modern executive. He had an extraordinary memory and the ability to pick the essence from any document no matter how long or

³⁸ David Robarge, 37.

³⁹ Richard Helms, 191.

complex, and to reduce it to a few sentences....For McCone, deadlines were deadlines, and no matter if sometimes unrealistic, were to be met to the minute. He also knew that all manner of devils dwelt in the details.⁴⁰

Winning the support of his subordinates was only the first half of the task. He also needed to expand his own authority as DCI over the whole of the Intelligence Community.

Expanding His Authority

As leader of the IC, the position of the DCI is codified in law, the National Security Act of 1947. While directly serving as head of the CIA, DCI McCone exercised his control over the rest of the IC through his chairmanship of the United States Intelligence Board (USIB). National Security Council Intelligence Directive (NSCID) 1, released on January 18, 1961, defined the role of the USIB.

...to maintain the relationship necessary for the fully coordinated intelligence community, and to provide for a more effective integration of and guidance to the national intelligence effort...⁴¹

When DCI McCone took over the USIB it was comprised of the following organizations: CIA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Security Agency (NSA), the service departments of the Department of Defense (Army, Navy and Air Force), and the Joint Staff.

NSCID 1 addressed the responsibilities of the DCI. In his role as Chairman of the USIB, DCI McCone was responsible to “coordinate the foreign intelligence activities of

⁴⁰ Richard Helms, 195.

⁴¹ Michael Warner, ed., *Central Intelligence: Origin and Evolution*, (Washington D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001), 61.

the United States in accordance with existing law and applicable National Security Council directives.”⁴² Further DCI McCone also played a central role in the dissemination of NIEs. NSCID 1 elaborated on the requirements.

The Director of Central Intelligence shall disseminate national intelligence to the President, members of the National Security Council as appropriate, members of the U.S. Intelligence Board and, subject to existing statutes, to such other components of the government as the National Security Council may from time to time designate or the U.S. Intelligence Board may recommend.⁴³

Along with his statutory authorities, DCI McCone sought out a personal endorsement of his position from President Kennedy. DCI McCone “did not want to be merely the president’s special assistant for intelligence or have anyone else in the administration assuming the role of national intelligence officer,”⁴⁴ he wanted to be the lead intelligence person for the President and the government.

Solidifying His Authority

DCI McCone took a dual-track approach to solidifying his authority over the IC. First, he reorganized the USIB. Second, he sought out President Kennedy’s endorsement of his new stature. DCI McCone focused on reforming the structure of the USIB to enhance his position over the IC. As Chairman of the USIB, DCI McCone had the “most important bureaucratic lever...for exerting force on these agencies.”⁴⁵ The first step he took was to remove himself as the voice of the CIA on the USIB. The Deputy Director

⁴² Michael Warner, ed., 61.

⁴³ Michael Warner, ed., 65.

⁴⁴ David Robarge, 30.

⁴⁵ David Robarge, 64.

of Central Intelligence sat on the USIB as the CIA representative. By removing himself as the Agency's advocate, DCI McCone became the President's advocate.⁴⁶

He further streamlined the USIB by removing the Joint Staff and the individual military services. In their place, DCI McCone, with concurrence from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, placed the newly established Defense Intelligence Agency as the Department of Defense representative. In explaining his decision to the president, McCone stated that "in limiting the regular membership of the United States Intelligence Board....it would be our view that substantive dissents...should continue to be reflected in estimates and other findings and decisions of the United States Intelligence Board."⁴⁷

After completing the reforms of the USIB in December 1961, DCI McCone sought President Kennedy's endorsement. In a letter to DCI McCone, President Kennedy gave his personal endorsements to the changes made. He further endorsed DCI McCone's position as head of the IC.

In carrying out your newly assigned duties as Director of Central Intelligence it is my wish that you serve as the Government's principal foreign intelligence officer, and as such that you undertake, as an integral part of your responsibility, the coordination and effective guidance of the total United States foreign intelligence effort.⁴⁸

Along with the endorsement, the level of access granted by President Kennedy further enhanced DCI McCone's position. DCI McCone was allocated almost weekly

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "96. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Kennedy," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "96. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Kennedy," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "99. Memorandum From President Kennedy to Director of Central Intelligence McCone," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008).

private meetings with the President to discuss a wide range of intelligence matters. Increasing his own access enhanced the IC as well. Through his closeness with the President, CIA analysis was considered by those in the Agency to be worthwhile and readily accepted by senior policymakers within the administration.⁴⁹ By the end of 1962, McCone had completed the reorganization he deemed necessary to position himself as leader of the IC. This new leadership role allowed him a free hand to “deal with policymakers...”⁵⁰ DCI McCone’s self-confidence made him “a strong and assertive figure among policymakers.”⁵¹

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS – ENTERING THE POLICY DEBATE

Overview of Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over the Soviets installing offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba. While the actual event, termed the Cuban Missile Crisis, occurred during the last two weeks of October 1962, a series of events in the summer of 1962 led to the confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR. During the summer months of 1962, the Soviets shipped and installed offensive missiles in Cuba. The Soviets emplaced Surface-to-Air (SA)-2 missiles around sites in western Cuba to protect the installation of Surface-to-Surface (SS)-4 Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and SS-5 Intermediate-Range

⁴⁹ David Robarge, 38.

⁵⁰ David Robarge, 58.

⁵¹ William M. Leary, ed., *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, (University of Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 77.

Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). The U.S. tracked Soviet activities through aerial surveillance of Cuba. In August 1963, a debate ensued in Washington D.C. about Soviet intentions. On one side was DCI McCone who saw the Soviet buildup as offensive in nature. On the other side was the IC and policymakers within the Kennedy Administration who assessed Soviet intentions as defensive only. The Cuban Missile Crisis represented an important turning point in how DCI McCone saw his role in policymaking. From the crisis, DCI McCone “solidified his place in the Kennedy Administration as an active participant in the policy process.”⁵²

Prelude to October

Prior to the dramatic events of October 1962, DCI McCone was alone in his assessment of Soviet intentions in Cuba. Meanwhile, the general consensus within the Kennedy Administration and the IC was that the Soviet support to Cuba was defensive in nature only. DCI McCone, using his own analysis, foresaw the buildup of Soviet activities in Cuba in the summer of 1962 as offensive, not defensive, in nature. The basis for his contentions stemmed from his fervent anti-communist attitudes. Up until final confirmation of Soviet activities on Cuba in mid October, DCI McCone remained at odds with his own senior analysts in the IC.

The basis for this difference stemmed from DCI McCone’s “businessman’s intuition...to evaluate possibilities.”⁵³ While DCI McCone relied on intuition, his analysts relied on available facts to make an assessment. DCI McCone and his analysts saw the same information and came to different conclusions on Soviet activities. At the

⁵² William M. Leary, ed., 77.

⁵³ David Robarge, 104.

center of this dispute was the placement of Soviet SA-2 missile sites on Cuba. During the 1960's, the SA-2 was the Soviets "main anti-aircraft weapon."⁵⁴ The SA-2 could destroy "targets at an altitude of 27 kilometers and a range of 35 kilometers."⁵⁵ SA-2's were used to protect key installations within the USSR and Eastern Europe. It was a Soviet SA-2 missile that shot down the Gary Powers's U2 in 1960. The emplacement of SA-2's on Cuba allowed the Soviets to install the SS-4's and SS-5's under an effective anti-aircraft shield from potential U.S. attacks.

DCI McCone, alone, saw this emplacement of the SA-2's as a precursor to the establishment of MRBM and IRBM sites on Cuba. Russell J. Smith, the head of the Office of Current Intelligence within CIA, laid out the analysts' view on the placement of the SA-2's.

Throughout the 1950's we watched them splash SA-2's all over the Soviet Union, often in greater numbers and in places for which U.S. military men could find no reasonable justification. The Soviet Union also bestowed SA-2's lavishly on their Eastern European satellite states. So, to us it seemed neither particularly surprising nor significant that SA-2s were going to Cuba by the boatload.⁵⁶

This logical deduction was not supported by DCI McCone's analysis.

To Director John McCone, this was not persuasive. He was confident that investing so many SA-2s in Cuba meant that the Soviets intended to deploy something they wished to protect: offensive missiles to threaten the United States.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Missilethreat.com, "S-75 (SA-2 Guideline)," A Project of the Claremont Institute, http://www.missilethreat.com/missiledefensesystems/id.47/system_detail.asp (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁵⁵ Missilethreat.com, "S-75 (SA-2 Guideline)," A Project of the Claremont Institute, http://www.missilethreat.com/missiledefensesystems/id.47/system_detail.asp (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁵⁶ Russell J. Smith, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1992): 180.

⁵⁷ Russell J. Smith, 180.

On September 19, 1962, the Office of National Estimates released Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 85-3-62, titled “The Military Buildup in Cuba,” which backed the logic presented by Mr. Smith on Soviet activities on Cuba. The conclusion of the SNIE emphasized the importance of the defensive nature of the buildup. In the SNIE’s judgment, the Soviets were merely protecting their client state and not seeking a confrontation with the U.S. The SNIE further concluded that installation of offensive weapons “might provoke US military intervention,”⁵⁸ thus defeating the intent of the Soviets to protect Cuba.

Adding to DCI McCone’s problems, most senior members of the Kennedy Administration shared the same opinion of the IC on Soviet activities. Up until mid October 1962, DCI McCone’s assessment was dismissed as “a worst case scenario.”⁵⁹ For DCI McCone, the problem was that all evidence, up to that point, was unclear as to Soviet intentions. In discussing the Cuban Missile Crisis, Richard Helms succinctly puts it, “McCone’s deductive logic was one thing, proof positive was another.”⁶⁰

The Crisis in October

Proof positive occurred on 15 October 1962 when a U.S. U2 flight identified the installation of SS-4 and SS-5 sites on Cuba.⁶¹ During the 1960’s, the SS-4 was a single warhead nuclear missile that “constituted the bulk of the Soviet offensive missile threat to

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. X Cuba, 1961-1962*, “433. Special National Intelligence Estimate,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusX/421_443.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁵⁹ David Robarge, 106.

⁶⁰ Richard Helms, 212.

⁶¹ Richard Helms, 208.

Western Europe.”⁶² The maximum range of the SS-4 was 2,000 kilometers. From hardened sites built in western Cuba, a SS-4 could reach Washington D.C. In hardened positions the reaction time for launch was “five to fifteen minutes.”⁶³ The SS-5 was similar in design to the SS-4; however, with extra fuel capacity the SS-5 range was extended to 4,500 kilometers.⁶⁴ From Cuba, a SS-5 could reach San Francisco, California. The reaction time for the SS-5 was the same as the SS-4.⁶⁵

From 15 October until 31 October, the missile crisis consumed the Kennedy Administration. Within the administration the debate raged on how to effectively deal with the Soviet threat. DCI McCone was actively involved in all these debates. In the first week of the crisis, DCI McCone participated in over 30 meetings to debate the proper course of action against Cuba and the Soviet Union.⁶⁶

On October 17, 1962, DCI McCone laid out in a memorandum his views and recommended options the administration should follow. He used this memorandum as a basis for discussion with other policymakers in a meeting held on that same day. DCI McCone reminded all that he alone correctly assessed Soviet intentions.⁶⁷ Next he went into what he perceived the consequences were of U.S. actions. In his judgment a harsh

⁶² Globalsecurity.org, “R-12 / SS-4 SANDAL,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-12.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶³ Globalsecurity.org, “R-12 / SS-4 SANDAL,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-12.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶⁴ Globalsecurity.org, “R-14 / SS-5 SKEAN,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-14-specs.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶⁵ Globalsecurity.org, “R-14 / SS-5 SKEAN,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-14-specs.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶⁶ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, (Washington D.C.: History Staff, Central Intelligence Agency, 1992), 158-159.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, “26. Memorandum for Discussion,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

response by the U.S. could result in the death of Soviet personnel, further increasing tensions between the two superpowers. DCI McCone recommended the U.S. give Soviets a limited amount of time, no more than 24 hours, to dismantle their operations in Cuba. If they refused, DCI McCone recommended “we should make a massive surprise strike at air fields, MRMB sites and SAM sites concurrently.”⁶⁸

As DCI McCone pressured policymakers to take a hard line against the Soviets, he also worked to get the USIB in line with his thinking. Keeping the USIB informed on deliberations within the White House, DCI McCone laid out the considered courses of actions along with his analysis of each.

A discussion among the principals on October 18th indicated a probable decision, if any action is taken against Cuba, to initiate a limited blockade designed to prevent the importation into Cuba of additional arms....More extreme steps such as limited air strikes, comprehensive air strikes, or military invasion would be withheld awaiting developments....The arguments in favor of the blockade was principally that it initiated a positive action which could be intensified at our will or could be relaxed depending upon evolving circumstances....The obvious disadvantages are the protracted nature of the operation, the difficulties of sustaining our position in world opinion...and finally, the action does not reverse the present trend of building an offensive capability within Cuba....The above course of action is by no means unanimous....I would like guidance from the USIB members for my further discussions...⁶⁹

On October 19, 1962, the USIB released Special National Intelligence estimate 11-18-62.

Its conclusions tracked with the thinking of DCI McCone.

US acceptance of the strategic missile buildup would provide strong encouragement to Communists, pro-communists, and the more anti-American sectors of opinion in Latin

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, “26. Memorandum for Discussion,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁶⁹ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 193-194.

America and elsewhere. Conversely, anti-Communist and those who relate their own interests to those of the US would be strongly discouraged. It seems clear that, especially over the long run, there would be a loss of confidence in US power and determination and a serious decline of US influence generally....There is no reason to believe that a blockade of itself would bring down the Castro regime. The Soviets would almost certainly exert strong pressure elsewhere to end the blockade.⁷⁰

As the Cuban Missile Crisis played itself out over the two weeks, DCI McCone's role evolved. Initially he confined himself with presenting current intelligence to President Kennedy's national security team. As the crisis progressed, DCI McCone freely interjected his views into the policy debate. To better manage the crisis, President Kennedy created the Executive Committee (EXCOM), a smaller group from the National Security Council. DCI McCone was a member of the EXCOM. Within the EXCOM, the members formed into three groups: 'Hawks', who advocated "early and strong use of military force,"⁷¹ 'Doves' advocating reaching "a diplomatic settlement,"⁷² and 'Owls' who maneuvered between the positions of the Hawks and Doves.⁷³ DCI McCone belonged to the Hawk camp.

As these groups formed, the debates centered on four possible courses of actions: "[1] airstrikes, [2] a blockade cast as an ultimatum to be followed by air attacks, [3] a blockade as a delaying tactic to gauge Soviet intentions, and [4] a blockade as an opening

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, "32. Special National Intelligence Estimate," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁷¹ David Robarge, 114.

⁷² David Robarge, 114.

⁷³ David Robarge, 114.

to negotiations...”⁷⁴ From DCI McCone’s point of view, he favored a blockade that led to airstrikes. In a meeting of the NSC on October 20, 1962, DCI McCone gave his opinion on the courses of actions debated to President Kennedy.

McCone stated his opposition to an airstrike, but admitted that in his view a blockade was not enough. He argued that we should institute the blockade and tell the Russians that if the missiles were not dismantled within seventy-two hours, the United States would destroy the missiles by air attacks.⁷⁵

This opinion tracked his earlier position on October 17, 1962.

On October 20, 1962, the Kennedy Administration settled on a quarantine of Cuba in response to Soviet actions. While DCI McCone questioned the effectiveness of a quarantine, he did moderate his views to go along with President Kennedy’s decision. McCone’s pushing for stronger action was a similar approach he took towards Vietnam policy; gradual escalation without a forceful backup was no solution.

Alongside serving an intelligence role for President Kennedy, DCI McCone also served as his go between to senior leaders in the Republican Party, specifically former President Eisenhower. In this role, DCI McCone’s mission was to sell the administration’s policy. During the crisis, DCI McCone held two private meetings with Eisenhower to layout the position of the Kennedy Administration and also to provide his own view on the situation.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ David Robarge, 115.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, “34. Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁷⁶ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 157-158.

On October 17, 1963, DCI McCone met with Eisenhower. In a memorandum he wrote to capture the topics discussed, DCI McCone implied that he and President Eisenhower were in agreement as to the proper course of action.

In discuss[ing] the blockades, [Eisenhower] mentioned the difficulty of [a] type of operation we would take if and when a Soviet ship, laden with military hardware and personnel, is stopped on the high seas. The question he raised, as do I, is 'What would we do with the ship then?'I told General Eisenhower that I did not expect an answer but both the President and I wished him to be fully informed and that I would like to consult with him from time to time.⁷⁷

DCI McCone met again with Eisenhower on October 21, 1963. During this meeting, DCI McCone and Eisenhower discussed at length military options available to the U.S. During the meeting, Eisenhower sided with DCI McCone's arguments against a surprise attack by the U.S.⁷⁸ Eisenhower agreed that the potential for increased tensions was too great. Through his efforts, Eisenhower backed the actions of President Kennedy towards the Soviets and Cuba. By playing this role, DCI McCone managed to turn a potential partisan adversary of the President into a supporter.

On October 24, 1962, the Soviet Union ceased their shipment of missiles to Cuba. This began the next stage in the debate how to defuse the situation. The new debate centered on agreeing to the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba in exchange for the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. As the threat of a military option subsided, the question debated within the administration was how far to compromise with the Soviets. DCI McCone argued during this period that the U.S. had the upper hand and should demand the Soviets back down without giving them anything in return. Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), argued for the removal of U.S. missiles

⁷⁷ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 167-168.

⁷⁸ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 243-244.

from Turkey. He also argued that the U.S. should dismantle the naval base at Guantanamo, Cuba and allow UN inspectors to verify the dismantling of the missile sites. DCI McCone strongly and vehemently opposed these suggestions.

[DCI] McCone disagreed with Ambassador Stevenson's linking of Soviet missiles in Cuba to U.S. missiles in Turkey. He said the Soviet weapons in Cuba were pointed at our heart and put us under great handicap in continuing to carry out our commitments to the free world.⁷⁹

DCI McCone worried that the "administration might be compromising too much."⁸⁰ He further argued that only U.S. inspectors verify the dismantling of the missile sites in Cuba.

DCI McCone did make some contradictory statements as to the value of the missiles based in Turkey. In an oral interview given several years after the events of October 1962, DCI McCone downplayed the importance of the missiles in Turkey. As DCI McCone related "nobody ever thought the missiles in Turkey were worth anything anyways....They never should have been put there in the first place. I opposed them. I wanted them taken out a couple of years before."⁸¹ However at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone was adamant in his opposition to a missile swap to the point that he was excluded from further EXCOM meetings.⁸²

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, "79. Summary Record of the Sixth Meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/76_100.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁸⁰ David Robarge, 118.

⁸¹ John McCone, oral interview, 13.

⁸² David Robarge, 123.

Crisis Fallout

By the end of October, the Cuban Missile Crisis had subsided, and DCI McCone faced the repercussion of some of his actions. DCI McCone having correctly deduced Soviet intentions did not fail to remind everyone within the National Security apparatus that he was correct. In using an “I told you so attitude,” he alienated several key members of the Kennedy Administration that also played key roles in the Johnson Administration, individuals like McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara. Bundy commented about McCone’s performance. Bundy stated that he was tired of hearing how right DCI McCone was in predicting the Soviets’ intentions that he “never want[ed] to hear it again.”⁸³ Secretary McNamara held a similar view towards McCone’s performance. Secretary McNamara “privately criticized McCone for not predicting the crisis hard enough.”⁸⁴ From Secretary McNamara’s perspective, McCone’s correctness did not hide the fact that the CIA failed to accurately predict the Soviet threat.⁸⁵

Along with the criticism directed towards McCone’s activities, it was also directed against the CIA and its poor analytical performance. The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) reviewed the activities of the IC and presented their report to President Kennedy on February 4, 1963. The report concentrated on the analysis provide by the IC. Commenting on SNIE 85-3-62, the PFIAB report concluded that the “President and [policymakers] were ill served by the [SNIE].”⁸⁶ The PFIAB

⁸³ David Robarge, 129.

⁸⁴ David Robarge, 129.

⁸⁵ David Robarge, 129.

⁸⁶ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 366.

report attacked every key finding made by the IC in the SNIE. The report served as an indictment against the analytical performance of the IC.

We believe that the near-total intelligence surprise experienced by the United States with respect to the introduction and deployment of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba resulted in large part from a malfunction of the analytic process by which intelligence indicators are assessed and reported. This malfunction diminished the effectiveness of [policymakers], national intelligence estimators, and civilian and military officers having command responsibilities.⁸⁷

The report ignored DCI McCone's performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

On February 28, 1963, DCI McCone sent a memorandum to President Kennedy addressing the points of the PFIAB's report. In his response, he attempted to explain the failures of the IC's analysis. According to DCI McCone, analysts "were so convinced that the Soviets would not accept the inevitable confrontation resulting from the placements of offensive missiles in Cuba, [analysts] were inclined to dismiss such evidence as there was to the contrary."⁸⁸ DCI McCone faulted the analysts' ability to understand the intent of the adversary. While he faulted the failure of his analysts, DCI McCone did not fail to remind President that his "own views differed from those of the community."⁸⁹ The PFIAB report, combined with DCI McCone's assessment, only served to undermine the IC's analysis in the eyes of policymakers. The problems exposed by the IC's analysis would have a detrimental effect in policymakers accepting IC analysis on Vietnam.

⁸⁷ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 367.

⁸⁸ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 374.

⁸⁹ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 374.

In the end DCI McCone's performance strained his relations with President Kennedy, as it put into question DCI McCone's "political loyalties."⁹⁰ Congressional critics of the President "praised McCone for being the only administration figure to predict what Moscow would do in Cuba."⁹¹ Congressional Republicans "used [McCone's] post crisis testimony before a Senate committee to support assertions that the administration had blundered."⁹² These events strained his relations with President Kennedy. Prior to the crisis, DCI McCone enjoyed a close relation with President Kennedy. After the crisis that relationship grew more distant and more businesslike.⁹³ DCI McCone's lack of access furthered his isolation within the administration, as the administration debated the proper course to follow in South Vietnam.

⁹⁰ David Robarge, 129.

⁹¹ David Robarge, 134.

⁹² David Robarge, 129.

⁹³ David Robarge, 136.

CHAPTER 3

DCI MCCONE AND VIETNAM POLICY IN THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION, 1963

INTRODUCTION

During the first two years of the Kennedy Administration (1961-1962), DCI McCone focused on establishing his position within the IC. In 1963, as President Kennedy shifted his focus to South Vietnam so too did DCI McCone. This chapter examines DCI McCone's role during the Vietnam debates of 1963. Two events occurred during 1963 that highlighted his role. The first was DCI McCone's personal intervention in changing the tone of a National Intelligence Estimate. The second event was the debate on the fate of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Before discussing these two events it is important to give a brief overview of U.S. Vietnam policy up to 1963.

OVERVIEW OF U.S. VIETNAM POLICY

Policy under the Eisenhower Administration

From 1954 onwards, the United States was involved in the conflict in Southeast Asia. The U.S.'s effort concentrated on the survival of the South Vietnamese regime. The independence of Vietnam was established at the end of the Vietnamese war against

France in 1954. At the time, Vietnam was divided into two parts. North Vietnam was placed under communist rule, headed by Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam became a democratic state under the rule of President Diem. When South Vietnam became independent, the United States provided aid and support.

Initial support from the United States came in the form of economic and military assistance. During the Eisenhower Administration, a small number of U.S. military personnel were sent to train the new South Vietnamese military. The size of the U.S. contingent remained below 1,000 troops throughout the Eisenhower Administration. From its establishment, South Vietnam was fighting a communist led insurgency. The main insurgent group was the Viet Cong (VC), which received military and financial support from the government of North Vietnam. Throughout the remainder of the Eisenhower Administration, South Vietnam, with limited U.S. support, fought the VC to a stalemate but was never able to defeat them. Further adding to the problems in South Vietnam was the increased corruption in the Diem regime. President Diem, a Catholic, conducted a heavy repressive campaign against the majority Buddhist population of South Vietnam. In South Vietnam, 70% of the population was Buddhist.⁹⁴

Under President Diem power resided in the minority Catholic population. Between the two groups there was mutual animosity, with the majority Buddhist population considering the Catholic population as “undesirable.”⁹⁵ With power residing

⁹⁴ Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 284.

⁹⁵ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: American and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2008), 119. Hereafter cited as David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*.

in the Catholic minority “favoritism and abuses inevitably resulted.”⁹⁶ In some provinces of South Vietnam where the population was completely Buddhist, leaders of the province were all completely Catholic.⁹⁷ As President Diem was the main supporter of the Catholic minority population, they fervently supported President Diem. Catholics filled the ranks of President Diem’s internal security forces that were used against the Buddhists.⁹⁸ These actions of the Diem regime only served to alienate the local Buddhist populace from supporting the government.

Policy under the Kennedy Administration

When John Kennedy came into office he directed a fundamental review of U.S. Vietnam policy. Throughout 1961, the Kennedy Administration tried to determine a correct course of action to follow in Vietnam. Senior policymakers recognized that current U.S. policies on Vietnam were not working, as the VC was still unbeaten and the Diem regime was losing popular support.

The Kennedy Administration debated three possible courses of actions. The first option, Kennedy could commit large numbers of U.S. ground forces and begin large scale conventional operations against the VC.⁹⁹ A second option was an increase in economic and military aid to South Vietnam with the intent of using the aid to coax Diem into reforming his regime.¹⁰⁰ A third option was that the U.S. would commit to a minimal

⁹⁶ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 119.

⁹⁷ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 119.

⁹⁸ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 119.

⁹⁹ David Robarge, 167.

¹⁰⁰ David Robarge, 167.

presence in South Vietnam and provide all the necessary aid to Diem without strings.¹⁰¹

In November 1961, President Kennedy approved course of action three as U.S. policy.¹⁰²

However, for the remainder of Kennedy's term the U.S. military's role greatly expanded, transforming "the 'limited-risk gamble' of the Eisenhower Administration into a 'broad commitment' to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam."¹⁰³

THE REWRITE OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE 53-63

Introduction

A NIE is the consensus opinion of the entire IC. During the 1960's, NIE's were written by the CIA's Office of National Estimates (ONE). It was the responsibility of the ONE to draft a NIE, and then present it to the rest of the IC for review. After the review process, the completed draft was presented to the USIB for final approval and dissemination. Under DCI McCone, the ONE produced "about 50 national intelligence estimates a year."¹⁰⁴ In February 1963, DCI McCone directed the ONE to rewrite National Intelligence Estimate 53-63, *Prospects in South Vietnam*.

The Reason for DCI McCone's Interference

Why did DCI McCone force an unnecessary change to NIE 53-63 in February 1963? The main reason stems from the problems he faced within the administration after

¹⁰¹ David Robarge, 167.

¹⁰² David Robarge, 167.

¹⁰³ Neil Sheehan, et al. *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times*, (New York: Bantam Books, inc, 1971), 79.

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth J. Campbell, 56.

the Cuban Missile Crisis. He also struggled to reconcile his own negative views on the situation in Vietnam with the optimistic views of policymakers. In the end, DCI McCone chose to align with the policymakers rather than with his analysts.

In 1962, DCI McCone, along with Secretary of Defense McNamara, visited Vietnam. While Secretary McNamara “returned with glowing accounts of improvements in South Vietnam,”¹⁰⁵ DCI McCone held a more negative view on prospects in Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ DCI McCone’s hardcore anti-communist views did not coincide with the approach Kennedy chose to take in Vietnam.

[DCI] McCone disagreed with many of the diplomatic and military tactics the administration was using in Vietnam and questioned whether the United States could achieve its objectives. He became frustrated over the discrepancy between President Kennedy’s rhetoric and US actions....Impatience, a search for clarity, and a penchant for efficiency characterized McCone’s approach to the Vietnam question.¹⁰⁷

While carrying this attitude about U.S. efforts in Vietnam, DCI McCone surprised CIA analysts with his demand that NIE 53-63 be rewritten to reflect a more positive outlook on Vietnam.¹⁰⁸

In February 1963, the draft of NIE 53-63 was presented to the USIB, DCI McCone’s “voice in the administration had diminished after the Cuban missile crisis and...his persistent doubts about Vietnam further strained his relations with

¹⁰⁵ John Prados, *Lost Crusader The Secret Wars of CIA Director William Colby*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 106.

¹⁰⁶ Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962-1968*, (Pittsburgh: Government Printing Office, 1998), 6.

¹⁰⁷ David Robarge, 171.

¹⁰⁸ Harold P. Ford, 12.

policymakers.”¹⁰⁹ In February 1963, DCI McCone was contending with the findings from the PFIAB on the IC’s performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Still dealing with the fallout from the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone was in no mood to present a NIE that was at odds with the prevailing view of senior members of the Kennedy Administration.¹¹⁰ In the draft of NIE 53-63, the analysts questioned the fighting capabilities of the South Vietnamese military and its leadership, which if taken to its logical conclusion questioned the capabilities of the U.S. to effectively train this force.¹¹¹ Such an assertion put DCI McCone into conflict with the views of Secretary McNamara. Believing he needed to repair his relations with policymakers, DCI McCone undermined his own analysts.

NIE Rewrite

Since 1948, the CIA produced over 70 intelligence estimates, summaries or memorandums that dealt specifically with Southeast Asia,¹¹² without any interference from the DCI or policymakers. CIA analysts consistently maintained a pessimistic view of the situation in Vietnam.¹¹³

The initial draft of NIE 53-63, written in September 1962, followed the same pessimistic line as previous intelligence products on Vietnam. The draft took into

¹⁰⁹ David Robarge, 172.

¹¹⁰ David Robarge, 177.

¹¹¹ David Robarge, 177.

¹¹² David F. Gordon, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Pittsburgh: Government Printing Office, 2005), 651-655.

¹¹³ Harold P. Ford, 12.

account the current situation in Vietnam and attempted to present a balanced view on what was occurring.

The draft had some good analysis, new data and so on...it implied a possibility for swifter progress under a post-Diem Vietnamese government. There was no claim that Diem had to go. There was solid buttressing for the view that the Vietnam war had stalled. The January 1963 battle at An Bac where Viet Cong soldiers stood their ground and defeated South Vietnamese troops backed up by helicopters and armored personnel carriers, added further to the substance.¹¹⁴

The draft NIE was presented to the USIB in February 1963, and instead of embracing the assessment of his analysts, DCI McCone “savaged the NIE.”¹¹⁵ From DCI McCone’s viewpoint, the NIE never took into account the views of people who understood the situation in Vietnam.¹¹⁶

After rejecting the draft, DCI McCone demanded a complete rewrite to reflect the views of policymakers within the government. From his perspective, policymakers and not his analysts knew the situation in Vietnam the best.¹¹⁷

According to Director McCone, the people who knew best were [William] Colby; his chief of station, John Richardson; the Army’s Chief of Staff [General Earl Wheeler] and its South Vietnam commander [General Paul Harkins], [U.S.] Ambassador Fredrick Notling, the naval commander in the Pacific [Admiral Harry D. Felt], [Department of] State’s Roger Hilsman and the NSC staffer for Southeast Asia, Michael Forrestal.¹¹⁸

Since nearly all senior policymakers held an optimistic view on Vietnam, the draft of the NIE was not well received. Senior U.S. military personnel undercut the assertion

¹¹⁴ John Prados, 106.

¹¹⁵ John Prados, 106.

¹¹⁶ Harold P. Ford, 12.

¹¹⁷ Harold P. Ford, 12.

¹¹⁸ John Prados, 106.

that the South Vietnamese military was weak and ill served by its leadership. The worst comments came from the U.S. naval commander for the Pacific, Admiral Felt. He compared the document to North Vietnamese propaganda.¹¹⁹ Unable to persuade policymakers on their analysis, CIA analysts succumbed to the pressure and rewrote NIE 53-63. The resulting change in the document reflected the views held by senior policymakers. Released on April 17, 1963 NIE 53-63, made the following key judgment

We believe that Communist progress has been blunted and that the situation is improving. Strengthened South Vietnamese capabilities and effectiveness, and particularly US involvement, are causing the Viet Cong increased difficulty, although there are as yet no persuasive indications that the Communist have been grievously hurt.¹²⁰

The importance of the NIE's findings was embraced by senior policymakers. NIE 53-63 confirmed the optimistic reporting coming from U.S. officials in Vietnam. DCI McCone used his position to force a change to an NIE against the wishes of his analysts. While DCI McCone thought he had aligned the IC with the assessment of policymakers. In reality, he undermined the position of the IC.

NIE Fallout

Within one month of NIE 53-63's release, a major uprising by the majority Buddhist population in South Vietnam took place against the Diem regime. The size of anti-government riots and increased activities by Viet Cong forces "invalidated [NIE 53-63'] key judgments."¹²¹ Discarding their own involvement in the development of NIE

¹¹⁹ Harold P. Ford, 17.

¹²⁰ David F. Gordon, ed., 186-187.

¹²¹ David Robarge, 177.

53-63, senior policymakers in the Kennedy Administration concluded that DCI McCone and his analysts at CIA “had produced another authoritative but inaccurate estimate.”¹²²

Realizing that he unduly influenced the development of the NIE, DCI McCone sought to make amends. DCI McCone personally apologized to the analysts and vowed not to involve himself in the development of future NIEs.¹²³ In not questioning the assessment of future NIEs, DCI McCone placed himself at a disadvantage with the majority of policymakers holding an optimistic view of Vietnam.

As the situation in Vietnam worsened from May to July 1963, DCI McCone approved a Special National Intelligence Estimate to update the judgments in NIE 53-63. SNIE 53-2-63 was released in July 1963 with the following revised judgment:

The Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam has highlighted and intensified a widespread and long-standing dissatisfaction with the Diem regime and its style of government. If – as is likely – Diem fails to carry out truly and promptly the commitments he has made to the Buddhists, disorder will probably flare again and the chances of a coup or assassination attempts against him become better than ever...¹²⁴

As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated into August 1963, the Kennedy Administration concluded that the problem was not the U.S. effort but the regime of President Diem. In summer and fall 1963, policymakers within the administration debated the fate of President Diem. These policymakers debated whether they should support a coup against President Diem by the South Vietnamese military. DCI McCone

¹²² David Robarge, 177.

¹²³ Harold P. Ford, 17-18.

¹²⁴ Neil Sheehan, et al., 193.

interjected himself into this debate. Coming after the problems of NIE 53-63, DCI McConc entered this debate in a weak position and left in an even weaker one.

THE FALL OF PRESIDENT NGO DINH DIEM

Background to the Coup Debate

In May 1963, a crisis erupted in South Vietnam that undermined the U.S. effort up to that point. The primary reason for this crisis was the actions of President Diem against the majority Buddhist population in South Vietnam. The crisis began on May 8, 1963. According to Buddhist believers, May 8 is the birthday of the Buddha. To honor the Buddha, Buddhist monks requested the right to wave the flag of Buddha. The Diem government denied their request citing a government edict against the display of other national flags. However a few days before this request the Diem regime allowed the Vatican flag to fly over the city of Hue in honor of Diem's brother, a Cardinal in the Catholic Church. This action infuriated the Buddhist majority population.

Defying government orders, the monks flew the flag of the Buddha on his birthday. Further, thousands of Buddhist monks took to the streets of Hue in celebration of the Buddha's birthday. In retaliation, President Diem ordered the South Vietnamese military to suppress the demonstration. South Vietnamese forces fired on the crowd of monks, killing nine.¹²⁵ Two days later, over ten thousand monks took to the streets of Hue to protest the government's actions. President Diem responded by denouncing the Buddhist movement as a communist front organization and had the

¹²⁵ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam War 1945-1990*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 95.

leaders arrested.¹²⁶ President Diem subsequently ordered the South Vietnamese military to isolate the most active Buddhist pagodas,¹²⁷ around Hue and Saigon. These events in May 1963 invalidated the findings of NIE 53-63. The internal instability in South Vietnam highlighted the weakened position of President Diem.

Through the summer months of 1963, the situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. On June 11, 1963, a Buddhist monk set himself on fire to protest the actions of President Diem. These events shocked senior policymakers in Washington D.C. All the optimistic reporting they received prior to these events was shown to be wrong. For DCI McCone these events led to his decision to allow SNIE 53-63-2 to be published to account for the new situation on the ground.

Throughout June and July 1963, the United States attempted to force President Diem to soften his position and meet the demands of the Buddhists. Each attempt by the U.S. was met by an unyielding President Diem. By August 1963, most policymakers in the Kennedy Administration concluded that the main problem in South Vietnam was the rule of President Diem. President Diem's continued hold on power only served to weaken U.S. efforts to stabilize South Vietnam. In early August, President Diem realized the need to accommodate the U.S. position. President Diem promised the outgoing U.S. Ambassador Fredrick E. Nolting that he would refrain from any future actions against the Buddhist monks.¹²⁸

On August 21, 1963, President Diem broke his promise. Supported by his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, the head of South Vietnam's internal security, President Diem

¹²⁶ Marilyn B. Young, 95.

¹²⁷ Pagodas are temples used by Buddhist monks.

¹²⁸ Neil Sheehan, et al., 166.

ordered the CIA-trained South Vietnamese Special Forces to assault the Buddhist pagodas¹²⁹ across the country. The raid resulted in the arrest of over 1,000 monks.¹³⁰ President Diem's action shocked policymakers in Washington and opened the debate on his fate; however, the debate was not one sided. Policymakers formed into pro- and anti-Diem factions. The anti-Diem faction, primarily the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in South Vietnam, saw the removal of President Diem as the only way for the U.S. to succeed in South Vietnam. The pro-Diem faction, primarily the Defense Department and CIA, saw that there was no other leadership alternative to President Diem and the U.S. had to make the best of a bad situation. DCI McCone was a member of the pro-Diem faction.

The Coup Debate in Washington D.C.

On August 23, 1963, Henry Cabot Lodge replaced Ambassador Nolting in South Vietnam. Like the McCone appointment, Lodge, a Republican, was appointed in an attempt to elevate Vietnam policy above partisan politics. With the new ambassador came a new policy for dealing with President Diem. Under Ambassador Nolting, U.S. policy was to use persuasion to get President Diem to reform. With Ambassador Lodge, the new policy was to seek alternatives to the Diem's rule if President Diem refused to reform.

The change in policy occurred swiftly, without consent from the major policymakers in the Kennedy Administration. In the last week of August 1963, all major policymakers (President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Rusk, and DCI

¹²⁹ Neil Sheehan, et al., 166.

¹³⁰ Neil Sheehan, et al., 166.

McCone) were out of town on vacation. The anti-Diem faction took advantage of the vacuum in leadership to set in place a new U.S. policy in its relationship with President Diem. Officials in the State Department, Roger Hilsman¹³¹ and W. Averell Harriman¹³² and at the National Security Council, Michael Forrestal,¹³³ sent a cable with new instructions to Ambassador Lodge

[The] US Government cannot tolerate situation in which power lies in Nhu's hands. Diem must be given chance to rid himself of Nhu and his coterie and replace them with best military and political personalities available. If, in spite of all of your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved.¹³⁴

Only after the cable was sent to Ambassador Lodge did President Kennedy see it. After being told that it was supported by officials in State, Defense, and at CIA, President Kennedy approved the message.

DCI McCone never saw the cable. At the time of the cable's transmission, DCI McCone was on vacation in California. Richard Helms, the duty officer at the time, approved the cable, concluding that it was "a policy rather than an intelligence matter."¹³⁵ Mr. Helms never informed DCI McCone. William Colby, working in the CIA Far East Division, saw the cable after it had been approved by the President. Mr. Colby

¹³¹ Roger Hilsman was the Director, Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research from 1961 to 1963. He then became Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1963 to 1964.

¹³² W. Averell Harriman was the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1961 to 1963. He then became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from 1963 to 1965.

¹³³ Michael Forrestal was an aide on the National Security Council from 1962 to 1965.

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol III Vietnam, January-August 1963*, "281. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfi/iii/8177.htm> (accessed May 6, 2008).

¹³⁵ William Colby, *Honorable Men My Life in the CIA*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 210. Hereafter cited as William Colby, *Honorable Men*.

understood the desire of DCI McCone to be informed on all policy related matters. He passed the information to DCI McCone on the cable's content.

Ambassador Lodge understood his new instructions to mean start planning a coup against President Diem. Ambassador Lodge instructed the CIA Station Chief in Saigon, John Richardson, to contact discontented South Vietnamese generals who could lead a coup against President Diem. With DCI McCone unable to communicate with Mr. Richardson, William Colby instructed Richardson to obey the orders of Ambassador Lodge.¹³⁶

On August 29, 1963, President Kennedy met with his senior level advisors to discuss the new policy on President Diem. Deputy Director Marshall Carter represented the CIA. Although not in attendance, DCI McCone passed his concerns through Bundy to President Kennedy. As Bundy relayed, DCI McCone advocated against a coup. DCI McCone recommended the U.S. attempt to persuade Nhu to leave the country voluntarily; however, if a coup was the only option, DCI McCone stated that the U.S. needed assurance that a coup could be successful.¹³⁷

For participants, the true problem rested with Diem's brother and not Diem. Another concern was keeping U.S. involvement in any coup planning to a minimum so as to not let the Diem brothers know about U.S. activities. Bundy summarized the opinion of policymakers, "the coup was [South Vietnamese general's] show and that [the U.S.]

¹³⁶ William Colby, *Honorable Men*, 211.

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "15. Memorandum of Conference With the President," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjv/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

should stick with our plan, which was to support the Vietnamese effort.”¹³⁸ At this meeting President Kennedy made several decisions. The first was for the U.S. military to back up CIA approaches with the South Vietnamese military on coup planning.¹³⁹ The second was Ambassador Lodge had the authority to suspend aid to the Diem regime, after approval from President Kennedy.¹⁴⁰ The third gave Ambassador Lodge authority over all overt and covert operations in South Vietnam.¹⁴¹ In placing CIA covert activities under Ambassador Lodge, the CIA element in Saigon was isolated from DCI McCone’s directions. At the time, Richardson maintained backdoor channels with Nhu. Once Ambassador Lodge gained control of the CIA Station, he denied Richardson from any further contact with Nhu. All communications with Diem and his brother was through Ambassador Lodge alone.

On September 2, 1963, DCI McCone returned to Washington D.C. From September until the actual coup on November 2, DCI McCone held a consistent position. He opposed any attempt to forcefully remove President Diem and his brother from power. DCI McCone always favored using persuasion. There were several factors in his opposition. The first was that any move against Diem distracted from the mission of the

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

U.S. to combat the communist insurgency in South Vietnam. The second factor was that DCI McCone saw no other leadership alternative to President Diem.¹⁴² The final factor was a fear that a coup could lead to a protracted period of instability in South Vietnam.¹⁴³ Backing DCI McCone's analysis was the analysis of Russell J. Smith, Deputy Director for Intelligence. He presented his analysis to DCI McCone in a memorandum written on September 4, 1963. Mr. Smith's analysis attempted to contradict the opinion of the anti-Diem faction that the war could not be won with President Diem in power. Mr. Smith concluded that the current Buddhist uprising was not affecting the South Vietnamese government's efforts to defeat the VC.¹⁴⁴ According to Mr. Smith, the war could still be won under President Diem.¹⁴⁵

As he had done in the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone laid out his position in a memorandum he used as his talking points with policymakers. In a meeting held on September 12, 1963 with senior policymakers, DCI McCone argued for the U.S. to consider other options instead of a coup. DCI McCone continued to focus on the method of persuasion against the Diem brothers. DCI McCone outlined several steps the U.S. should support in lieu of removing President Diem. DCI McCone argued that the best solution was to remove Nhu from a position of authority and restructure the Diem

¹⁴² David Robarge, 181.

¹⁴³ David Robarge, 181.

¹⁴⁴ "Memorandum about ONE Memo: South Vietnam's Leader, 4 September 1963," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *Memorandum about ONE Memo*, CD-ROM.

¹⁴⁵ *Memorandum about ONE Memo*, CD-ROM

government to bring in more dissents.¹⁴⁶ DCI McCone's final argument was that the use of selective pressure on Diem showed U.S. resolve and that the war effort could continue with Diem still in power.¹⁴⁷ He requested that the CIA be allowed to resume communications with Diem. No actions were taken on any of DCI McCone's recommendations during this meeting.

Throughout the remainder of September 1963, the U.S. held to the position that increased pressure, short of a coup, on President Diem would result in the necessary improvements in his government. However this opinion changed after a visit by Secretary McNamara to Vietnam at the end of September. He concluded that not enough pressure was being placed on President Diem. In his findings to President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara stated that a coup against President Diem was too early and that the U.S. should exert maximum economic and political pressure on President Diem to reform.¹⁴⁸ Secretary McNamara concluded that his recommendations would either lead to reconciliation with President Diem or lead to an eventual coup against Diem.¹⁴⁹

During October 1963, the U.S. position shifted to the realization that a coup was the only available option against President Diem. While the pro-Diem faction still debated the need to remove President Diem, the anti-Diem faction, led by Ambassador Lodge, pressed ahead with planning a coup. DCI McCone's position was so consistent

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "99. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12648.htm> (accessed May 6, 2008).

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "99. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12648.htm> (accessed May 6, 2008).

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "167. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) and the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12651.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "172. Memorandum of Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12651.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

against a coup that policymakers largely ignored him. An internal memorandum at the State Department, written on October 18, 1963, identified DCI McCone as a roadblock to the maintenance of momentum in U.S. policy.¹⁵⁰ The memorandum characterized DCI McCone's opinions as his "familiar visceral feelings."¹⁵¹ According to the State Department officials, any policy not supported by DCI McCone was doomed to fail. In the end, officials at the State Department discarded DCI McCone's advice believing that DCI McCone only wanted to return to the August period where the U.S. remained in tacit support of President Diem.¹⁵²

Although his position was ridiculed by other policymakers, DCI McCone pressed his case directly to President Kennedy throughout the month of October 1963. As the date for the coup approach, DCI McCone "warned President Kennedy personally that removal of Diem would result in not one coup, but several coups – political turmoil that might extend over several years."¹⁵³ In hindsight DCI McCone's analysis was correct when two months after the coup against President Diem, another faction within the South Vietnamese military staged a coup against the military regime.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfv/12678.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfv/12678.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁵² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfv/12678.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁵³ John McCone, oral interview, 16.

During a meeting with the President at the end of October 1963, DCI McCone summarized the situation in removing President Diem. DCI McCone used a baseball analogy, pointing out that “if I was a manager of a baseball team, and I had one pitcher, I’d keep him in the box whether he was a good pitcher or not.”¹⁵⁴ Although President Kennedy was apprehensive about an impending coup, he never directed Ambassador Lodge to demand the South Vietnamese military to stop their planning. In that vacuum, Ambassador Lodge pressed ahead with coup planning. By the end of October 1963, DCI McCone’s position had been marginalized within the administration, with the U.S. tacitly supporting the South Vietnamese military planned coup against President Diem.

On November 2, 1963, the long planned coup occurred resulting in the removal and execution of Diem and his brother Nhu. Removing Diem forced the U.S. to become more entrenched in the affairs of South Vietnam. During the last two years of DCI McCone’s tenure, his focus remained on Vietnam and finding the right policy; however, this had to be done under a new President, Lyndon Johnson.

¹⁵⁴ Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, (New York: Times Books, 1995) 81-82.

CHAPTER 4

DCI MCCONE AND VIETNAM POLICY IN THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION, 1963-1965

INTRODUCTION

DCI McCone remained head of the IC through the first part of the Johnson Administration (1963-1965). For DCI McCone, the situation in Vietnam remained his most dominant foreign policy issue. Policymakers in the Johnson Administration conducted numerous policy reviews from 1963 to 1965 to find the right formula for success in South Vietnam. DCI McCone remained consistently pessimistic about the chances of success in South Vietnam. Eventually senior policymakers favored and accepted a policy of a gradual escalation of force. The intent of the new policy was to use limited air strikes against North Vietnam in order to pressure it into accepting a negotiated solution. While policymakers coalesced around this policy, DCI McCone's views diverged to favor a more aggressive approach against North Vietnam. DCI McCone saw that the only way to win in Vietnam was to conduct "a fullbore aerial assault on North Vietnam."¹⁵⁵ His policy views evolved through 1964. By 1965, DCI McCone settled on advocating for a large sustained air campaign against North Vietnam. He advocated this policy with President Johnson and other senior policymakers. It was in

¹⁵⁵ David Robarge, 397.

1965, his final months as head of the IC, that DCI McCone “argued himself out of a job.”¹⁵⁶

This chapter focuses on two areas. First this chapter focuses on the problems DCI McCone faced under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson. Next this chapter focuses on DCI McCone’s evolving view of Vietnam policy and how he advocated his position with other policymakers and the President.

WORKING FOR PRESIDENT JOHNSON

President Kennedy’s Style

DCI McCone never adjusted to the leadership style of President Johnson. More comfortable working under President Kennedy’s style, DCI McCone attempted to transplant that leadership style onto President Johnson. Under President Kennedy, advice was sought from a broad range of advisors. President Kennedy did not use the formalized structure of the National Security Council to debate policy matters; he preferred a process where advisors debated issues more openly and directly with him. DCI McCone, while concerned with the lack of NSC meetings, utilized the freewheeling style to gain almost an unrestricted access to President Kennedy. DCI McCone also enjoyed the fact that President Kennedy was interested in all “aspects of intelligence,”¹⁵⁷ and spent time learning for “ways to use the information and capabilities the [IC]

¹⁵⁶ David Robarge, 423.

¹⁵⁷ David Robarge, 72.

afforded him.”¹⁵⁸ President Johnson, on the other hand, never held the same “intellectual curiosity toward intelligence.”¹⁵⁹

Added to the problem of President Johnson’s lack of interest in intelligence was the limited contact the two had while Johnson served as Vice President under Kennedy. The contact between the two men was sporadic at best; DCI McCone felt no obligation to keep the Vice President informed of the world situation.¹⁶⁰ Further complicating this situation was a directive by President Kennedy to deny giving the *President’s Intelligence Checklist* (the precursor to today’s *President Daily Brief*) to Vice President Johnson due to their past political rivalry.¹⁶¹ With little to no interaction between the two, the moment Lyndon Johnson became President was a cold start for the both of them.

President Johnson’s Style

When Johnson assumed the presidency, the key change he made was to restrict access. Shifting away from the NSC, President Johnson’s main policy formulation board was the Tuesday Lunch Group.¹⁶² President Johnson utilized the NSC format merely as a method of confirming already agreed to policy positions developed by the President and a small group of advisors. President Johnson preferred a smaller and more closely knit

¹⁵⁸ David Robarge, 72.

¹⁵⁹ David Robarge, 72.

¹⁶⁰ John Helgerson, *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates*, “Chapter 3: Into Politics with Kennedy and Johnson,” Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/cia-briefings-of-presidential-candidates/cia-6.htm> (accessed May 15, 2008). Hereafter cited as John Helgerson, *CIA Briefings*.

¹⁶¹ John Helgerson, *CIA Briefings*.

¹⁶² Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 318.

group of advisors, who basically agreed with his positions.¹⁶³ The key players in the group were Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and NSC Advisor Bundy. In time Secretary McNamara became the most dominant policy advisor to President Johnson. Although DCI McCone had a good working relation with Secretary Rusk, his relationship with Bundy and McNamara were strained since the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁶⁴

With few allies, DCI McCone's views were not supported by other members of the Tuesday Lunch Group. The group met from February 1964 until September 1964, with DCI McCone only attending six of the 27 lunch groups that met during that time.¹⁶⁵ When the Tuesday Lunch Group resumed meeting in March 1965, DCI McCone attended none of those meetings.¹⁶⁶ It was this group that determined future Vietnam policy. Unable to get access to President Johnson, DCI McCone became frustrated in his job. Believing that his opinions and advice were not listened to, DCI McCone contemplated resigning on two occasions. The first in the summer of 1964; however, President Johnson dissuaded him, asking him to hold on until after the Presidential elections in the fall of 1964. The second time was in April 1965, which President Johnson accepted.

¹⁶³ Harold P. Ford, 40-41.

¹⁶⁴ David Robarge, 356.

¹⁶⁵ David Robarge, 356.

¹⁶⁶ David Robarge, 356.

DCI MCCONE AND VIETNAM 1963-1964

The Transition

Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency after the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. With no transition time, President Johnson inherited not only the foreign policy challenges faced by President Kennedy but he also inherited the entire national security apparatus of the Kennedy Administration. In needing stability and continuity, President Johnson decided to keep all of President Kennedy's advisors in place.

The first meeting between DCI McCone and the new President occurred on 23 November 1963 in the office of National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. The outcome of that first meeting has been debated. Two participants, Russell J. Smith and Chester Cooper, presented two divergent views of what occurred during the meeting. Russell J. Smith, Deputy Director for Intelligence, accompanied DCI McCone on that meeting. Mr. Smith recalls the meeting as follows:

We found the newly installed president in the basement secretarial offices. He came out of McGeorge Bundy's office and stood amid the clutter of secretaries typing and telephones ringing and talked briefly with McCone and me. Besides the compact, trim McCone he looked massive, rumped, and worried. He had no interest whatsoever in being briefed, and after some inconsequential chatting, he turned back into Bundy's office. We had no way of knowing it, but we had just witnessed a preview of McCone's future relationship with Lyndon Johnson.¹⁶⁷

Chester Cooper, who worked for Bundy at the NSC, presents a different interpretation of the meeting. According to his version,

¹⁶⁷ Russell J. Smith, 190.

McCone and the President went into Bundy's office... Bundy and I waited outside. McCone came away from that short meeting tremendously impressed with the new President's self control. He had listened carefully, and asked some searching questions. He told the Director he would ask for another detailed briefing.¹⁶⁸

In his memoirs, President Johnson supported Mr. Cooper's version of the meeting.¹⁶⁹

Why the two different perspectives of the same meeting? Mr. Smith may have written his account to place the blame of the strained relations on President Johnson and chose one single point that highlighted the failed relations between the two men. In reality the relationship between the two men deteriorated over time, with DCI McCone pressing his views on an increasingly uninterested President. From DCI McCone's perspective, this meeting and subsequent meetings with the President served only to further his case for a more active role in policy formulation.

DCI McCone in a memorandum written several days after their first meeting leaves the impression that President Johnson wanted to rely heavily on his advice in policy matters.

He said that he felt my work in intelligence was of greatest importance, but he did not wish me to confine myself to this role. He said that he had observed that I had rather carefully avoided expressing myself on policy or suggesting courses of action and he suggested that it might be for interdepartmental reasons that I would wish to continue to do this in meetings (which he felt was a mistake), but nevertheless he invited and would welcome my coming to him from time to time with suggestions of courses of action on policy matters which, in my opinion, were wise even though they were not consistent with

¹⁶⁸ Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), 221-222.

¹⁶⁹ Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 22.

advice he was receiving from responsible people.¹⁷⁰

Several weeks later, in another meeting, DCI McCone again leaves the impression that President Johnson sought to expand the DCI's role.

At breakfast the President immediately brought up his desire to change the image of the DCI from a cloak and dagger role to the role of an adviser to the President on world situations derived from intelligence sources which were of importance to the President in reaching policy decisions. For this reason he intended to call upon me for a great many activities which would be different from those of the past.¹⁷¹

For the remainder of his term, DCI McCone's actions followed this perceived guidance given by President Johnson. DCI McCone assumed that President Johnson desired his input on policy matters. However, DCI McCone's "candor in providing advice to the President eventually led to a strained relationship."¹⁷² Believing he could express himself more openly on policy matters, specifically on the Vietnam War, only isolated DCI McCone within the administration.

Setting the Course on the Vietnam War under President Johnson

DCI McCone, from the start of the Johnson Administration, focused primarily on the situation in Vietnam. DCI McCone maintained a consistently pessimistic outlook on Vietnam; however, his view on the correct policy was an evolutionary process that started in 1963 and was completed by the end of 1964. Almost immediately after assuming

¹⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "112. Memorandum for the Record," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfk/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 7, 2008).

¹⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "115. Memorandum for the Record," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfk/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 7, 2008).

¹⁷² John Helgeson, CIA Briefings.

office, President Johnson experienced the divergent views of his policymakers and DCI McCone.

On November 25, 1963, Ambassador Lodge updated President Johnson on the situation in Vietnam after the coup against President Diem. In notes taken from the meeting, DCI McCone relayed that Ambassador Lodge's statements were "optimistic, hopeful, and left the President with the impression that we are on the road to victory."¹⁷³ When asked for his opinion, DCI McCone stated that his assessment "was much less encouraging."¹⁷⁴ DCI McCone stated VC activity had not been stopped and the new South Vietnamese government was too weak to challenge the VC. He concluded there was "no basis for an optimistic forecast of the future."¹⁷⁵ In this meeting President Johnson agreed that the situation was serious but not to the extent portrayed by DCI McCone.¹⁷⁶ President Johnson then focused on the need to improve the situation in Vietnam and work to stabilize the new government.

On November 26, 1963, President Johnson approved National Security Action Memorandum no. 273, establishing the policy the United States followed in Vietnam as well as demanding policymakers work together.

It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all U.S. decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.

¹⁷³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "330. Memorandum for the Record of Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjv/12673.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁷⁴ Lyndon Johnson, 43.

¹⁷⁵ Lyndon Johnson, 43.

¹⁷⁶ Lyndon Johnson, 43.

The President expects that all senior officers of the Government will move energetically to insure the full unity of support for established U.S. policy in South Vietnam. Both in Washington and in the field, it is essential that the Government be unified. It is of particular importance that express or implied criticism of officers of other branches be scrupulously avoided in all contacts with the Vietnamese Government and with the press.¹⁷⁷

In the first months of the Johnson Presidency, DCI McCone largely tracked with the opinions of other policymakers on the situation in Vietnam.

In December 1963, DCI McCone, along with Secretary McNamara, conducted a fact finding mission to Vietnam. During this visit, both McCone and McNamara shared the same outlook on the future prospects in Vietnam. In his report to the President, Secretary McNamara stated that the situation in Vietnam was “very disturbing.”¹⁷⁸ Secretary McNamara found faults not only in the new South Vietnamese government but also in the effort made by the U.S. team in South Vietnam.¹⁷⁹ In the end Secretary McNamara argued that the situation is reversible but opened the door for a more aggressive U.S. response if the situation did not improve.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “331. National Security Action Memorandum No. 273,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12673.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

While DCI McCone agreed with many of Secretary McNamara's conclusions, DCI McCone felt "a little less pessimistic than [McNamara]."¹⁸¹ From DCI McCone's perspective the main problem stemmed from allowing the coup against Diem to proceed, with the new government in South Vietnam unable to counter the improving strength of the VC. DCI McCone concluded that "there are more reasons to doubt the future of the effort under present programs...than there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of our cause in South Vietnam."¹⁸² In the end President Johnson listened to the advice of Secretary McNamara. President Johnson concluded that "[McNamara's] judgment was closer to the hard truth."¹⁸³ While Secretary McNamara shared DCI McCone's pessimistic views on Vietnam it did not deter him from finding the right policy to follow and "pursue the war effort."¹⁸⁴ By the end of December 1963, Secretary McNamara started to gain the ear of President Johnson, convinced that he shared the "determination to find a winning formula."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "375. Letter From the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone) to President Johnson," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjif/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁸² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "375. Letter From the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone) to President Johnson," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjif/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁸³ Lyndon Johnson, 64.

¹⁸⁴ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 90.

¹⁸⁵ Fredrik Logevall, 91.

The March 1964 Visit to Vietnam

In January 1964, General Nguyen Khanh¹⁸⁶ led a coup against the military government in South Vietnam. In ousting the government, any relative stability gained in South Vietnam was lost. Viewing the current situation in South Vietnam the IC published SNIE 50-64, *Short Term Prospects in South Vietnam*, on 12 February 1964. The SNIE supported DCI McCone's previous negative outlook on South Vietnam, concluding:

That the situation in South Vietnam is very serious, and prospects uncertain. Even with US assistance approximately as it is now, we believe that; unless there is a marked improvement in the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Government and armed forces, South Vietnam has at best an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months.¹⁸⁷

By March 1964, the situation in Vietnam had not improved. As a result, President Johnson ordered his top advisors back to Vietnam for another assessment. DCI McCone observed the new situation and presented his case for action. On March 3, 1964, DCI McCone wrote a memorandum to Bundy. After observing the changes in South Vietnam, DCI McCone concluded "that the situation is worse now than it was in December and therefore I am more pessimistic of the future of the American cause in South Vietnam than my December report reflects."¹⁸⁸ DCI McCone next moved to his own analysis of

¹⁸⁶ Genral Nguyen Khanh was a general in the South Vietnamese Army who participated in the coup against President Diem. In 1963, General Khanh was Deputy Chief of Staff of the South Vietnamese Army. From 1964 – 1965, he served as Prime Minister of South Vietnam. In 1965 he became President of South Vietnam. He was overthrown in February 1965.

¹⁸⁷ "SNIE 50-64, *Short Term Prospects in South Vietnam*," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

the possible course of actions the U.S. should follow. The first course was for the U.S. to accept a neutral South Vietnam.¹⁸⁹ The second course was maintain the status quo and hope for the best.¹⁹⁰ A third was to increase U.S. involvement in South Vietnam.¹⁹¹ A final course of action was to expand the operation into North Vietnam.¹⁹²

While DCI McCone viewed the fourth course of action favorably, he believed that the relative instability in South Vietnam precluded the application of this course, at the time. Another aspect that precluded taking the fight to North Vietnam was the potential escalation of the war, bringing in China. DCI McCone, making his own assessment, concluded that the threat of Chinese intervention was nonexistent. He argued that, in his opinion, U.S. attacks against North Vietnam was not worth China intervening.¹⁹³ In the end DCI McCone concluded that, at the time, “carrying the war to North Vietnam would not win the war in South Vietnam.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed June 21, 2008).

¹⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

Supporting DCI McCone's arguments was an internal analysis done by the CIA in February 1963. This analysis was done at DCI McCone's personal request and not disseminated to other policymakers.¹⁹⁵ According to the CIA analysts the South Vietnamese population is neither siding with the government or with the VC, but are more "responsive to the latter because it fears the VC."¹⁹⁶ Accordingly the South Vietnamese government needed to reassert itself with its own population and take the fight to the VC. The analysts concluded that "the new regime will enjoy stability in direct proportion to the degree it galvanizes and energizes the government apparatus...."¹⁹⁷ In order to pursue this option in the future, DCI McCone argued for a series of steps the U.S. should take to strengthen the South Vietnamese government.

In laying out his position for a harsher push against North Vietnam, McCone placed himself at odds with other policymakers who looked for a more measured approach. It was during the March 1964 visit that Secretary McNamara and DCI McCone diverged on the outlook for success. In his report presented to the President on March 16, 1964, Secretary McNamara highlighted his proposed course of actions, including areas where DCI McCone dissented. In highlighting DCI McCone's dissent, Secretary McNamara minimized DCI McCone's case. Secretary McNamara highlighted

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "38. Report From the Executive Director-Comptroller of Central Intelligence (Kirkpatrick) and the Station Chief in Saigon (de Silva) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed July 1, 2008).

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "38. Report From the Executive Director-Comptroller of Central Intelligence (Kirkpatrick) and the Station Chief in Saigon (de Silva) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed July 1, 2008).

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "38. Report From the Executive Director-Comptroller of Central Intelligence (Kirkpatrick) and the Station Chief in Saigon (de Silva) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed July 1, 2008).

two areas of disagreement with DCI McCone, the stability of the current South Vietnamese government and future combat operations against North Vietnam.

In discussing the status of the South Vietnamese government, Secretary McNamara argued that the South Vietnamese government was far more stable than what DCI McCone believed. Secretary McNamara concluded that “evidences of energy, comprehension, and decision add up to a sufficiently strong chance of Khanh’s [government] really taking hold in the next few months for us to devote all possible energy and resources to his support.”¹⁹⁸ Secretary McNamara pointed out DCI McCone’s dissent by stating that DCI McCone only believed there was insufficient data to make a determination on the Khanh’s government.¹⁹⁹ Secretary McNamara ignored DCI McCone’s recommendations on steps to strengthen the South Vietnamese government. As for future operations against North Vietnam, Secretary McNamara argued that any actions against North Vietnam could result in destabilizing the new South Vietnamese government.

By the end of his report Secretary McNamara concluded “that the situation in South Vietnam can be significantly improved in the next four to six months.”²⁰⁰ He then highlighted DCI McCone’s opposition “that the situation in South Vietnam is so serious

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

that it calls for more immediate and positive action than I have proposed.”²⁰¹ In giving President Johnson a case for future action for Vietnam, Secretary McNamara gained the upper hand in the policy debate, summing up DCI McCone’s arguments as a case of any action taken as “too little, too late.”²⁰² Secretary McNamara made twelve recommendations to the President. The most important recommendations were for increased support to the South Vietnamese government, an increase in the size of the South Vietnamese military, and to limit U.S. military operations to South Vietnam but be in position to commence operations against the North, if needed.²⁰³

Presented with a positive course of action to follow in Vietnam, President Johnson accepted the advice of Secretary McNamara. Secretary McNamara assured the President that “if we carry out energetically the proposals..., Khanh can stem the tide in South Vietnam, and within four to six months, improve the situation there.”²⁰⁴ On March 17, 1964, President Johnson ordered the release of National Security Action Memorandum No. 288, which approved in total the recommendations of Secretary McNamara.²⁰⁵ In accepting all of Secretary McNamara’s proposals, President Johnson

²⁰¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “86. Summary Record of the 524th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 17, 1964, Noon,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “87. National Security Action Memorandum No. 288,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

had in effect discounted DCI McCone's arguments. By presenting DCI McCone's case as only seeing the negative in all situations, Secretary McNamara successfully minimized DCI McCone's influence in President Johnson's eyes. By the end of March 1964, President Johnson "had lost confidence in McCone."²⁰⁶

The Summer and Fall Debates

As the war progressed through the summer of 1964, the situation on the ground in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. Policymakers in Washington D.C. looked for a new policy to improve the situation. Secretary McNamara described the new policy.

Its opening moves would include a congressional resolution and communication with Hanoi, followed by a series of graduated military pressures, culminating in limited air attacks against North Vietnam.²⁰⁷

The IC examined this new policy in SNIE 50-2-64, *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, published on May 25, 1964. According to the SNIE, in the short term, initial responses from North Vietnam may result in accepting a negotiated solution.²⁰⁸ However if U.S. attacks persisted, North Vietnam "might intermittently step up the tempo of the insurrection in South Vietnam."²⁰⁹ The one unresolved issue in the SNIE was the threshold of where North Vietnam would capitulate

²⁰⁶ John Helgerson, CIA Briefings.

²⁰⁷ Robert McNamara, 121.

²⁰⁸ "SNIE 50-2-64, *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *SNIE 50-2-64, Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, CD-ROM.

²⁰⁹ *SNIE 50-2-64, Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, CD-ROM.

to U.S. attacks and accept a negotiated settlement over regime destruction.²¹⁰ Only seeing the short-term benefits Secretary McNamara assumed that the analysis from the SNIE supported the new policy. From Secretary McNamara's perspective, the SNIE "concluded there was a reasonable chance such a plan would lead Hanoi to reduce the level of insurgency."²¹¹

In South Vietnam, General Khanh was unable to mobilize his country to fight against the VC. At the same time the South Vietnamese people also suffered from leaders who were "under-trained and over-worked."²¹² Frustrated with the lack of progress in South Vietnam, President Johnson ordered his top advisors to Honolulu, Hawaii in June 1964 to discuss the situation and present revised recommendations.

DCI McCone participated in these discussions in Honolulu and presented to the assembled audience a consistently negative assessment. From the records of the conference, DCI McCone never addressed the conclusions of SNIE 50-2-64. He maintained his pessimistic outlook on Vietnam. On June 2, 1964, DCI McCone summarized his view seeing "the downward spiral as continuing."²¹³ According to DCI McCone there was an erosion of the will to fight on the part of the South Vietnamese.²¹⁴ Coming out of this conference was another series of recommendations from Secretary

²¹⁰ SNIE 50 SNIE 50-2-64, *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, CD-ROM.

²¹¹ Robert McNamara, 121.

²¹² Chester Cooper, 232.

²¹³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "189. Summary Record of Meetings, Honolulu, June 2, 1964, 8:30-11:50 a.m. and 2:15-4 p.m.," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/181_225.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "189. Summary Record of Meetings, Honolulu, June 2, 1964, 8:30-11:50 a.m. and 2:15-4 p.m.," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/181_225.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

McNamara. First the United States military needed to push South Vietnamese forces into the provinces to counter the VC. Second the U.S. needed to increase the number of U.S. military advisors. However, one action not agreed to were air strikes against the North. Secretary McNamara concluded that it was “unlikely that a strike against the north would be desirable at any time within the next 3 to 6 months.”²¹⁵ To policymakers the fear of a wider war, drawing in China, negated the advantages of massive air strikes against North Vietnam.

Muddling through the summer of 1964, U.S. policy and action changed dramatically in August when North Vietnamese boats attacked two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. Navy was operating near the North Vietnamese coastline in support of U.S. and South Vietnamese covert operations. The Gulf of Tonkin incident resulted in a radical shift in U.S. policy and a dramatic escalation of U.S. operations against North Vietnam. At the time of the debate, Secretary McNamara realized that limited combat operations against North Vietnam were necessary. With Secretary McNamara pushing for surgical strikes against North Vietnam, DCI McCone cautioned the assembled group about the outcome of only conducting limited strikes. DCI McCone stated that “proposed U.S. reprisals will result in a sharp North Vietnamese military reaction.”²¹⁶ Further DCI McCone attempted to justify North Vietnamese actions

The President: Do they want a war by attacking our ships in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin?

Director McCone: No. The North Vietnamese are reacting

²¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “201. Paper Prepared for the President by the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), Washington, June 5, 1964,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/181_225.html (accessed May 29, 2008).

²¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “278. Summary Notes of the 538th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, August 4, 1964, 6:15-6:40 p.m.,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

defensively to our attacks on their off-shore islands. They are responding out of pride and on the basis of defense considerations. The attack is a signal to us that the North Vietnamese have the will and determination to continue the war. They are raising the ante.²¹⁷

President Johnson not wanting to appear weak accepted the need to conduct reprisals against North Vietnam. To solidify his position, he demanded support from the U.S. Congress. Within days, Congress approved, with massive majorities, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to authorize the President “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”²¹⁸

As the U.S. prepared to take the fight to North Vietnam, the situation in the south remained tenuous, with the South Vietnamese government unable to provide any form of stability. CIA analysts concluded in SNIE 53-64, published on September 8, 1964, that “at present the odds are against the emergence of a stable government capable of effectively prosecuting the war in South Vietnam.”²¹⁹ However, at the same time, Bundy concluded that “Khanh will probably stay in control and may make some headway in the next 2-3 months in strengthening the government.”²²⁰ In his memorandum, Bundy presented the President with several options including continued maritime operations and surgical, limited strikes against North Vietnam. He did not argue for any expanded air operation against North Vietnam. During a meeting with President Johnson, on

²¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “278. Summary Notes of the 538th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, August 4, 1964, 6:15-6:40 p.m.,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²¹⁸ Thomas E. Gort, “Joint Resolution of Congress H.J. RES 1145 August 7, 1964,” <http://www.hbci.com/~tgort/tonkin.htm> (accessed May 20, 2008).

²¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “341. Special National Intelligence Estimate,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/339_345.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²²⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “342. Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/339_345.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

September 8, 1964, DCI McCone sided with the recommendations of Bundy, stating that the “recommended actions were appropriate, and that a sustained air attack at present would be dangerous because of the weakness of the [South Vietnamese government].”²²¹

In November 1964, the NSC conducted another systematic review of Vietnam policy. With representatives from all major agencies, including CIA, the group worked to define three possible options for the U.S. to follow in Vietnam: option A was for the U.S. to conduct reprisal strikes against North Vietnam, if needed,²²² option B called for a “program of sudden, severe, intensive bombings,”²²³ against North Vietnam, and finally option C called for “graduated airstrikes,”²²⁴ against North Vietnam. These discussions became the basis for U.S. policy for the “balance of (DCI) McCone’s tenure.”²²⁵

During the debate, the group considered that option A was overcome by events on the ground and that additional steps needed to be taken. The group also ruled out option B as too dramatic that could widen the war beyond the control of the U.S.²²⁶ The group coalesced around option C with the U.S. undertaking “a gradually escalating program of military actions, including airstrikes against the North, as a way to coerce Hanoi into negotiating.”²²⁷

²²¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “343. Memorandum of a Meeting, White House, Washington, September 9, 1964, 11 a.m.,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/339_345.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²²² Harold P. Ford, 68.

²²³ Harold P. Ford, 68.

²²⁴ Harold P. Ford, 68.

²²⁵ David Robarge, 402.

²²⁶ David Robarge, 402.

²²⁷ David Robarge, 402.

DCI McCone's position was still evolving. He did not like the "efficacy of the incremental approach,"²²⁸ which option C presented. He clearly favored harsher action against North Vietnam, but the relative instability of the South precluded any dramatic push in that direction.²²⁹ In the end, President Johnson sided with the analysis of the NSC group and accepted option C as U.S. policy. On December 7, 1964, President Johnson approved a new policy for the United States in Vietnam. The new policy was implemented in two phases. In the first phase, starting in early December 1964, "covert operations and aerial reconnaissance flights [into North Vietnam] would be intensified."²³⁰ In January 1965, the second phase began. In the second phase, "an escalating series of aerial attacks against North Vietnam would commence."²³¹ From this point, DCI McCone observed the new policy in action and concluded that more action was needed and looked towards continuous, intensified air strikes as the solution.

DCI MCCONE'S FINAL DAYS, 1965

Pursuing the Harder Line

In January 1965, DCI McCone recognized that the South Vietnamese government may never reach the level of stability he desired. DCI McCone switched his advocacy to following the harder line regardless of the situation in the south. In policy terms, DCI

²²⁸ David Robarge, 403.

²²⁹ David Robarge, 403.

²³⁰ David Robarge, 403.

²³¹ David Robarge, 403.

McCone came to embrace the assumptions around option B,²³² the massive air strikes against North Vietnam. While DCI McCone's position evolved to quicker action against North Vietnam, several other policymakers, such as Secretary McNamara, still held to the slow escalatory approach. DCI McCone was convinced that his path was the correct one to achieve success in Vietnam. DCI McCone concluded that the only way for the U.S. to accomplish its objectives in South Vietnam required "substantially increased air strikes against [North Vietnam]."²³³ DCI McCone not only tried to persuade other policymakers but also appealed directly to President Johnson. From February 1965 until his resignation in April 1965, DCI McCone made a concerted effort to get policymakers to accept his views.

On February 3, 1965, DCI McCone held a private meeting with President Johnson to layout his view on the current situation in Vietnam. Not only did he discuss intelligence matters but DCI McCone also offered policy recommendations to President Johnson. First, DCI McCone commented on the weakness of the South Vietnamese government, which was unable to provide any form of stability in the south. DCI McCone concluded that the current government's days in power were "numbered."²³⁴ Second, DCI McCone stated that the policy the President approved last winter was a path that could lead to defeat.

We could not win the way we were going and therefore we must take military action against North Vietnam. I advocated bombing of selected targets in North Vietnam, starting in the south and working north and carrying the raids on intensively, that is at

²³² David Robarge, 404.

²³³ David Robarge, 404.

²³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "61. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/56_70.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

least one a day. I said that we should gradually work towards the north but should not strike deeply into North Vietnam territory.²³⁵

When questioned by the President whether these action could bring China into the conflict, DCI McCone was dismissive of any threat.

I said there was a possibility that they would come in on the ground but they had little capability in the air. I said we had to face this contingency and be prepared to handle any possible development but added that while Chinese Communist ground intervention was a possibility, I did not estimate it as a probability under the course of action advocated.²³⁶

This was the line of argument DCI McCone followed for the remainder of his tenure, strike North Vietnam without worrying about the potential consequences.

On February 7, 1965, the VC attacked a U.S. base at Plicku, South Vietnam resulting in numerous U.S. casualties. In response to these attacks, U.S. policymakers supported increased reprisal attacks against North Vietnam.²³⁷ This escalation led to the decision for the commencement of Operation ROLLING THUNDER. Following a visit to Vietnam, in early February 1965, Bundy presented the President and other policymakers a proposal for sustained, escalatory strikes against North Vietnam. In advocating this method, Bundy rejected the proposals of DCI McCone for a massive strike against the North. Bundy argued that “the best available way of increasing our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of sustained

²³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “61. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/56_70.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “61. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/56_70.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²³⁷ Robert McNamara, 170.

reprisal against North Vietnam.”²³⁸

The recommended policy was debated by the National Security Council in a meeting on February 8, 1965. Two written accounts of this meeting exist, one by the White House and the second by DCI McCone. In the White House version, the only item DCI McCone brought up was that Chinese reactions to U.S. actions will most likely be limited in nature.²³⁹ DCI McCone, on the other hand, used this meeting as another avenue to present his arguments for a more dynamic response to North Vietnam. DCI McCone believed the U.S. “should pursue a systematic series of attacks against targets, starting in the south sector of North Vietnam and that we should work toward the north.”²⁴⁰ According to DCI McCone, he could not accept the proposals of Bundy.

At this point I expressed very strong opinion that I felt that our actions would not be positive enough, and would not be taken in a sustained and consistent manner. I urged that we organize to strike every day or at least every second day and that we carry it on regardless of what the Soviets say or what the Chinese Communists say or what anybody else says. In other words, my differing with the proposals of Bundy was that I proposed a more rapid cadence of the operation.²⁴¹

Unwilling to conduct operations to the extent advocated by DCI McCone, President Johnson accepted Bundy’s proposals. DCI McCone made the same arguments at another NSC meeting on February 10, 1965, advocating “very strongly an immediate U.S./[South

²³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “84. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/81_86.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “87. Summary Notes of the 547th Meeting of the National Security Council,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/87_95.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “88. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/87_95.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “88. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/87_95.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

Vietnamese] [air] strike of substantial proportions and urged that this be done promptly.”²⁴²

Weighing in on the reaction to a U.S. air campaign was a special national intelligence estimate. SNIE 10-3/1-65, published on February 18, 1965, concluded that the type of air campaign advocated by Bundy would not cause North Vietnam to back down; in fact the most likely reaction by North Vietnam “would probably be to continue their pressures in the South.”²⁴³ Directed by DCI McCone to examine his own proposal for a larger air campaign, the analysts at CIA sided with DCI McCone’s position. The SNIE concluded that a more sustained and aggressive air campaign could result in North Vietnam accepting conditions to negotiate with the U.S.²⁴⁴ In reference to possible Chinese intervention, SNIE 10-3/1-65 sided with DCI McCone’s assessment. The SNIE concluded that China would not “intervene in Vietnam with substantial military forces.”²⁴⁵ DCI McCone, in a letter to the President, pointed out that the IC’s analysis gave greater weight to his policy proposal.²⁴⁶

Rejecting this advice, President Johnson sided with Bundy’s proposal and ordered the commencement of air strikes against North Vietnam under Operation ROLLING

²⁴² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “99. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/96_99.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴³ “SNIE 10-3/1-65, *Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*,” in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁴⁴ *SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁴⁵ *SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “196. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Johnson,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/195_198.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

THUNDER. Supporting limited air operations against North Vietnam also had a secondary effect of increasing U.S. ground troops into South Vietnam.²⁴⁷ The expanded U.S. air bases in South Vietnam required additional U.S. ground forces to protect them.

Advocating and Leaving

In his last months, DCI McCone pushed several policymakers to accept his prescription on Vietnam. However in several discussions, DCI McCone's method of pointing out the failures of the established U.S. policy and the rightness of his own position further alienated and isolated him. In a discussion with Secretary McNamara on March 18, 1965, DCI McCone reminded Secretary McNamara of the correctness of his position. According to DCI McCone, Secretary McNamara agreed with his position that the current air campaign was ineffective.²⁴⁸ DCI McCone then reminded Secretary McNamara that it was the conclusion of the IC that the air campaign could not succeed and pointed out that a more forceful air campaign will reach the level of success desired by the U.S.

During April 1965, his final month in office, DCI McCone continued to push policymakers and the President to accept his position. The catalyst for the push was an April 1, 1965 NSC meeting where President Johnson approved an increase in U.S. ground forces but not an increase in the air campaign against North Vietnam.²⁴⁹ DCI McCone relayed his displeasure in the new mission for the U.S.

²⁴⁷ Robert McNamara, 174.

²⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*. "206. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/ab_out_state/history/vol_ii/202_220.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴⁹ David Robarge, 410.

I wished to point out that the air strikes have not brought an indication that the DRV are softening in their attitude--if anything they have hardened their position. I stated that I felt we must consider this carefully in view of yesterday's decision to change the mission of the ground forces.²⁵⁰

Recognizing that President Johnson had no intention of withdrawing from Vietnam, DCI McCone continued to advocate his position for a massive air campaign.²⁵¹ By then his own frustration of being isolated finally compelled DCI McCone to offer his resignation, which was accepted by President Johnson on April 2, 1965. DCI McCone remained in his position until the U.S. Senate approved his successor, retired Vice Admiral William Rabron. DCI McCone's last day in office was set for April 28, 1965. Free from the burdens of keeping his job, DCI McCone continued to push his position until his last day in office.

On April 21, 1965, President Johnson's principal advisors met to discuss a new proposal from Secretary McNamara to increase U.S. ground forces in Vietnam by an additional 30,000 troops, bringing the total ground force to roughly 80,000 troops.²⁵² Secretary McNamara also argued that the current air campaign was sufficient to bring enough pressure on North Vietnam to seek a negotiated solution.²⁵³ DCI McCone took issue with this assessment pointing out:

²⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "232. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/221_240.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵¹ David Robarge, 406.

²⁵² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "265. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "265. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

...that the level of our bombing against [North Vietnam] had undoubtedly inconvenienced and created difficulties for the VC and the [North Vietnam] in their supply and infiltration operations but had not brought them to a halt, and I felt a continuation of such bombing could be absorbed by the DRV and would stiffen their determination rather than bring them to the conference table.²⁵⁴

DCI McCone reminded the President that the IC agreed with him on the effectiveness of the air campaign.²⁵⁵ Policymakers, hearing the same critique from DCI McCone discounted DCI McCone's position.

Analysts from the IC continued to press policymakers on the weakness of their assumptions of the air campaign. In a memorandum to policymakers on April 21, 1965, CIA analysts offered several conclusions based on the decision to conduct the air campaign at current levels and to increase U.S. ground forces to 80,000 troops.²⁵⁶ The main conclusion offered was that without an increase in the air campaign, North Vietnam most likely would continue to follow their current policy of supporting the VC with "additional men and equipment."²⁵⁷ With the IC firmly supporting DCI McCone, any further analysis offered by the IC under DCI McCone's tenure were ignored by policymakers. On April 21, 1965, President Johnson committed to a path of increased ground presence without the adjoining increase in air activity.

DCI McCone, distraught over the decision, recorded a conversation with Secretary of State Rusk. While continuing to point out the flaws in the current policy,

²⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "266. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "266. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵⁶ "Memo Reactions to a US Course of Action in Vietnam," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *Memo Reactions to a US Course of Action in Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁵⁷ *Memo Reactions to a US Course of Action in Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

DCI McCone highlighted the comments made to him by Secretary Rusk. In Secretary Rusk's opinion, DCI McCone's position was non-supportable.

Rusk said that we could not be sure that carrying the bombing north would bring them to the conference table. [McCone] pointed out that the existing estimate was that when the industrial north was threatened, they very probably would seek some form of negotiation. Rusk replied that the policies of the April 21st paper were not made hurriedly, that my letter of April 2nd had been thoughtfully considered, and the decision to pursue the war on the basis outlined in the April 21st paper was deliberately made after extended discussions between McNamara, Rusk and Bundy.²⁵⁸

On his final day as DCI, April 28, 1965, DCI McCone met with the President. In that meeting DCI McCone expressed his opposition to the policy position advocated by Secretary McNamara and supported by the NSC.²⁵⁹ Included in his discussion was a letter he gave the President laying out his views on the current policy. DCI McCone argued for the U.S. to conduct more aggressive air strikes against the North. As DCI McCone described the scene after giving the letter to President Johnson, the President took it and "placed it on his desk without comment."²⁶⁰ DCI McCone concluded his meeting and observed "this is as far as I can go or, for that matter, as far as the Agency should go in this matter, which is of a strictly policy nature."²⁶¹

Why was DCI McCone's position not supported by President Johnson and other policymakers? Beyond the fact that President Johnson had lost confidence in DCI

²⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "275. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "278. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "278. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "278. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

McCone, another factor was the fear of Chinese intervention if the U.S. dramatically increased air attacks against North Vietnam. While DCI McCone minimized the possibility of Chinese intervention, several policymakers “felt that the risks of a sharply increased air war, including the possibility of deeper Chinese and Soviet involvement, outweighed the possible advantages.”²⁶² In the end President Johnson accepted the views of these advisors over the view of DCI McCone.

Another perspective on DCI McCone’s position came from Secretary McNamara, arguing that the air strikes alone could not change the opinion of North Vietnam; it also required an increase in ground activities in South Vietnam.²⁶³ According to Secretary McNamara, following DCI McCone’s logic meant an air campaign “short of genocide.”²⁶⁴ Following the departure of DCI McCone, senior policymakers continued to grope with the proper course of action for the Vietnam War. The final decision was made in July 1965, having ignored the intelligence provided, to commit to an open ended conflict in Vietnam. President Johnson ordered a massive increase in U.S. ground combat forces, and shifting U.S. ground forces to an active combat role against North Vietnam and the VC. What President Johnson did not do was order an increase in the air campaign, siding with Secretary McNamara’s analysis. In the end, DCI McCone, attempting to be a policy advocate, caused him to lose influence with other policymakers.

²⁶² Lyndon Johnson, 140.

²⁶³ Robert McNamara, 180.

²⁶⁴ Robert McNamara, 180.

CHAPTER 5

AFTER MCCONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how the role of the head of the IC fared since DCI McCone left office. The first area covered is the how the DCI's position has diminished between the tenures of John McCone and George Tenet. The second part of this chapter examines the challenges faced by DCI Tenet in the lead up to the Iraq War and how this situation did or did not relate to the problems of DCI McCone. In focusing on DCI Tenet, the areas covered for comparison were his background prior to assuming the position of DCI, how DCI Tenet took charge of the IC, how DCI Tenet fared under the leadership styles of President William J. Clinton and George W. Bush, how the CIA's success in Afghanistan elevated his status with President Bush and how DCI Tenet undermined U.S. intelligence in the lead up to the Iraq War in 2003.

FROM DCI MCCONE TO DCI TENET

Between DCI McCone and DCI Tenet, eleven men served as DCI. Since the tenure of DCI McCone, most DCIs have refrained from the McCone model on policy involvement, staying within their mandate of providing intelligence to determine the feasibility of a debated policy. Once a policy was decided, the head of the IC has

refrained from offering a different prescription. While this is the ideal role for the DCI and the IC, it has been difficult at times.

Since the tenure of DCI McCone, the position of DCI has often succumbed to partisan politics. In 1967, Richard Helms became DCI. He was one of the few DCIs to hold his position across different administrations. DCI Helms served not only President Johnson but remained when Richard M. Nixon assumed the Presidency in 1969. In the early 1970's, William Colby (1973-1976) and George H. W. Bush (1976-1977) served as DCIs. When Jimmy Carter assumed the presidency in 1977, he made the DCI another political appointee, ousting then DCI Bush for Stanfield Turner simply because of a change in administration.²⁶⁵ Four years later, Ronald Reagan replaced DCI Turner with his own man, William Casey (1981-1987). Appointing DCI Casey established the precedent for selecting a new DCI at the beginning of a new administration.

In 1989, George H. W. Bush became President and attempted to revert back to the old model of keeping the previous DCI in place. He kept William Webster (1987-1991), a Reagan appointee in office. In 1991, President Bush appointed Robert Gates as DCI. DCI Gates remained in his position until removed by William J. Clinton. After assuming office, President Clinton appointed James Woolsey as DCI in 1993. Under President Clinton the position of DCI further declined. In the two years DCI Woolsey served as DCI, he only met President Clinton twice, "an all time low in the agency's annals."²⁶⁶ With little access to the President, DCI Woolsey became an ineffective head of the IC.

Adding to the problems faced by the IC in the Clinton Administration was the fallout from the Aldrich Ames espionage case. Morale at the CIA plummeted under DCI

²⁶⁵ Christopher Andrew, 427.

²⁶⁶ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 440.

Woolsey. At the end of 1994, DCI Woolsey resigned. It took the Clinton Administration almost three months to find a replacement.²⁶⁷ In 1995, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch finally agreed to become DCI. DCI Deutch served until 1997. In 1997, after failing to get Anthony Lake²⁶⁸ approved as DCI, President Clinton nominated George Tenet for the position of DCI. DCI Tenet served until 2004, the second longest tenure as head of the IC.²⁶⁹

BACKGROUND ON GEORGE TENET

DCI Tenet's Background

DCI Tenet's background in intelligence is markedly different from DCI McCone. While DCI McCone had little to no experience in intelligence before taking charge of the IC, DCI Tenet was well versed in intelligence-related matters. Prior to becoming DCI, Tenet's history of public service, in one form or another, was intelligence focused. From the late 1980's to 1993, DCI Tenet served as the staff director for the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI).

In 1993, with the beginning of the Clinton Administration, DCI Tenet transferred to the National Security Council staff. From 1993 until 1995, DCI Tenet was the staff officer in charge of intelligence.²⁷⁰ In 1995, DCI Tenet was appointed by President

²⁶⁷ Tim Weiner, 454-455.

²⁶⁸ Anthony Lake served as President Clinton's National Security Advisor from 1993 to 1997.

²⁶⁹ Douglas Garthoff, *Directors of Central Intelligence as Leaders of the U.S. Intelligence Community, 1946-2005*, (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc, 2007.), 276. When he resigned, DCI Tenet surpassed DCI Helms. The only person to be DCI the longest was Allen Dulles.

²⁷⁰ Douglas Garthoff, 257.

Clinton to the position of Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DDCI), under DCI Deutch. When DCI Deutch left in December 1996, Tenet became the Acting Director. On July 11, 1997, President Clinton appointed George Tenet as DCI, after the failure of the Anthony Lake nomination.²⁷¹

Taking Charge of the IC and Policymaking Role

Taking Charge. Like DCI McCone, DCI Tenet had to rebuild the morale of the CIA. In the case of DCI McCone it was the fallout from the Bay of Pigs. For DCI Tenet it was the neglect of intelligence issues by the Clinton Administration during its first term. DCI Woolsey had no access to President Clinton and left after less than two years in the job. DCI Deutch served after no one else wanted the job, leaving after only two years. From 1993 to 1997, President Clinton had three DCIs. With little continuity at the top, the position of the IC steadily eroded. As a result of the end of the Cold War, the IC's budget declined under the Clinton Administration. DCI Tenet described the situation, "the entire [IC], not just the CIA, lost billions of dollars in funding,"²⁷² Along with a loss of funding, the IC workforce was cut by 25 percent.²⁷³ These problems added up to serious morale problems in the IC.

DCI Tenet's first task was to reestablish morale and assert his authority over the IC. He pushed the Clinton Administration to approve an increase in the intelligence budget. DCI Tenet pushed for an additional two billion dollars per year for the next five

²⁷¹ Douglas Garthoff, 257.

²⁷² George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm, My Years at the CIA*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 14.

²⁷³ George Tenet, 14.

years (1997- 2002).²⁷⁴ When he did not receive support from the Clinton Administration, he went directly to Congress for additional funding.²⁷⁵ More money for the IC was not enough to rebuild morale, DCI Tenet also worked to strengthen the missions of the CIA.

When DCI McCone came into office he concentrated his effort on expanding the analytical aspect of the CIA. DCI Tenet focused his effort on rebuilding the clandestine element of the CIA. To DCI Tenet, the most important aspect of the CIA's mission was espionage and "stealing secrets."²⁷⁶ Under DCI Tenet's tenure, CIA increased the number of stations throughout the world by 30 percent.²⁷⁷ With his focus on the clandestine side of the CIA's mission, he neglected CIA's analytical capacity. While focusing on clandestine operations proved a success in Afghanistan, the neglect of the analytical aspects of the CIA proved disastrous during the 2002-2003 Iraq War debate.

One major area of difference between DCI McCone and DCI Tenet was their view of the role they played as head the IC. DCI McCone viewed his mission as head of the IC first and head of CIA second. DCI Tenet took the opposite approach. DCI Tenet viewed his leadership of CIA as more important than being head of the IC. DCI Tenet "believed first and foremost that it was essential to rebuild the director's base, CIA."²⁷⁸ Once he had rebuilt the CIA, he believed he could concentrate on repairing the morale in the IC. DCI Tenet failed to provide proper oversight for the IC as he concentrated his

²⁷⁴ George Tenet, 21.

²⁷⁵ George Tenet, 21.

²⁷⁶ George Tenet, 22.

²⁷⁷ George Tenet, 22.

²⁷⁸ George Tenet, 27.

efforts solely on the CIA. Without proper oversight, the IC entered the Iraq War debate in a weakened position.

Policymaking Role. Unlike DCI McCone, DCI Tenet had a clear view of his role in policymaking. While DCI McCone actively engaged in the policy process, DCI Tenet understood policymaking was not the purview of the intelligence professional. According to DCI Tenet, the IC doesn't "make policy; [the IC] implements it."²⁷⁹ Even with this attitude, DCI Tenet, on occasion, was drawn into the policy debate.

Under the Clinton Administration, DCI Tenet had a major policymaking role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. DCI Tenet was responsible for working out the security arrangements between the Israelis and Palestinians. His work began in 1996 while he was the Deputy Director under DCI Deutch and carried over into his directorship. To justify his new role, DCI Tenet saw it less as policymaking and more as being an "honest broker."²⁸⁰ DCI Tenet allowed the two parties to negotiate directly with each other and attempted to minimize his own role. According to DCI Tenet, the less involved he was the better it was for all the parties.²⁸¹ Even with this view, DCI Tenet also understood the need for his involvement. According to DCI Tenet, the CIA was the one "entity both sides could trust."²⁸² He served in this function as a policymaker until the Bush Administration came into office. According to DCI Tenet, the Bush Administration did

²⁷⁹ George Tenet, 55.

²⁸⁰ George Tenet, 55.

²⁸¹ George Tenet, 55.

²⁸² George Tenet, 64.

not want the head of the IC involved in policymaking.²⁸³ Under the Bush Administration, DCI Tenet's role centered on intelligence-related matters, not policymaking.

Working Under Two Presidents

DCI Tenet served two different presidents. Like DCI McCone, DCI Tenet had to adjust to the challenges of two different styles of leadership. Each president, in turn, had a different vision for DCI Tenet's involvement with policy matters.

President Clinton's Leadership Style. When Clinton assumed office in 1993 he had little to no understanding of the role of intelligence. The IC's influence during President Clinton's first term steadily eroded. When DCI Tenet assumed office, he had to repair the strained relationship between the President and the IC. In the Clinton Administration, the DCI was granted cabinet level access, a precondition for DCI Deutch accepting the job.²⁸⁴ Even with cabinet level status, his access to President Clinton was sporadic.²⁸⁵

President Clinton did have confidence in DCI Tenet's leadership. On two occasions, President Clinton backed up DCI Tenet in policy disputes. The first occurred in 1996 during the Wye River Summit between Benjamin Netanyahu²⁸⁶ and Yasser

²⁸³ George Tenet, 80.

²⁸⁴ George Tenet, 136.

²⁸⁵ George Tenet, 136.

²⁸⁶ Benjamin Netanyahu was Prime Minister of Israel from 1996 to 1999.

Arafat.²⁸⁷ As part of the discussions, the Israelis demanded the release of Jonathan Pollard,²⁸⁸ in exchange for the Israelis accepting any negotiated settlement with the Palestinians. DCI Tenet and the IC adamantly opposed his release. According to DCI Tenet, being actively engaged in the security negotiations and allowing the release of Pollard would have undermined his authority as head of the IC.²⁸⁹ Any release of Pollard would have implied that DCI Tenet approved the release. DCI Tenet took his case directly to President Clinton and threatened to resign if Pollard was released.²⁹⁰ In the end, President Clinton supported the position of DCI Tenet, despite increased pressure from the Israelis.

The second occasion where President Clinton supported DCI Tenet was during the Kosovo Air Campaign in 1999. During the air campaign, U.S. aircraft accidentally bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia. The U.S. military used data provided by the CIA for striking targets in Belgrade. According to DCI Tenet, pressure mounted on the White House to find a scapegoat, and DCI Tenet “seemed the likely candidate.”²⁹¹ In the end, President Clinton pushed back and kept DCI Tenet in office.

President Bush’s Leadership Style. When George W. Bush assumed the Presidency, the access changed. While he lost his cabinet level rank, his access to the

²⁸⁷ Yasser Arafat was head of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank from 1994 until his death in 2004.

²⁸⁸ Jonathan Pollard spied for Israel against the United States in the late 1980’s. At the time of the Wye River Summit, Mr. Pollard was incarcerated for espionage against the United States. He is still in prison.

²⁸⁹ George Tenet, 67.

²⁹⁰ George Tenet, 68.

²⁹¹ George Tenet, 48.

President increased dramatically.²⁹² As DCI McCone recognized the importance of his access to the President, so too did DCI Tenet. According to DCI Tenet, “being in regular, direct contact with the president is an incredible boon to a CIA director’s ability to do his job.”²⁹³ DCI Tenet met with President Bush on a daily basis during his time as DCI, often participating in the daily intelligence update to the President.

Over time this level of access became a detriment to DCI Tenet. While Tenet wanted to be an important member of the Bush Administration, and “please his superiors,”²⁹⁴ that closeness to President Bush, in the end, caused him to lose his effectiveness as a leader of the IC. During the policy debates in the Bush Administration on the Iraq War, DCI Tenet sided with policymakers over his intelligence professionals.

DCI TENET AND OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. moved to strike at Al Qaida sanctuary bases in Afghanistan. It was the CIA operations in Afghanistan that raised the stature of DCI Tenet with President Bush. The basis for the CIA’s success in Afghanistan was the groundwork done prior to September 11.

Despite the lack of interest policy makers showed to Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, the CIA remained active in the area, working to increase its network of HUMINT sources. In fact, on September 10, 2001, the CIA had more than one hundred sources and subsources operating throughout the country. From this network of sources, the CIA was able to build a winning

²⁹² George Tenet, 136.

²⁹³ George Tenet, 137.

²⁹⁴ Tim Wiener, 487.

strategy to defeat Al Qaida.²⁹⁵

The actions of the CIA showcased the success of DCI Tenet's focus of rebuilding the clandestine service in the 1990's.

On September 17, 2001, President Bush directed the use of lethal operations against the Al Qaida network and their sponsors, the Taliban, in Afghanistan. While the Defense Department under Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was unable to move military forces fast enough to the region, the CIA filled in the void. Within days of the presidential order, CIA paramilitary teams were on the ground fighting alongside the Northern Alliance.²⁹⁶ The speed of CIA operations contrasted with the slowness of the Defense Department brought friction between Secretary Rumsfeld and DCI Tenet.

DCI Tenet downplayed any friction with Secretary Rumsfeld.²⁹⁷ In the initial stages of the operation in Afghanistan, the CIA was the lead agency, with the Defense Department in a supporting role. It was not until mid October 2002 that U.S. Special forces began to operate on the ground in Afghanistan. At this point, Secretary Rumsfeld asserted his position to be the sole person in charge of operations in Afghanistan. DCI Tenet took the opposite view on the need to place CIA paramilitary teams under the authority the Defense Department. DCI Tenet argued that the if the teams "fell under Pentagon control, the big bureaucracy would stifle [CIA] initiative and prevent [the CIA]

²⁹⁵ (b)(6) of Henry A. Crumpton, "Intelligence and War: Afghanistan, 2001-2002," in *Transforming U.S. Intelligence* ed. Jennifer E. Sims and Burton Gerber, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2005, for MSI 611-10, *Intelligence and National Security Policy* for National Defense Intelligence College on January 6, 2008.

²⁹⁶ The Northern Alliance was a collection of various Afghani groups that fought against the Taliban.

²⁹⁷ George Tenet, 208.

from doing the job....”²⁹⁸

The friction between the CIA and Defense Department on the operational side carried over to the analytical side. On October 25, 2001, Secretary Rumsfeld directed the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to prepare an analysis claiming that the Northern Alliance would not defeat the Taliban “before winter.”²⁹⁹ DCI Tenet disputed the findings of DIA, claiming that the CIA and Northern Alliance were making progress towards defeating the Taliban.³⁰⁰ On November 9, 2001, Defense officials briefed that operations around the city of Mazar-i-Shairf, Afghanistan, were “not going well.”³⁰¹ DCI Tenet again contradicted this assessment. Supporting DCI Tenet were the views of Hank Crumpton, the CIA’s lead operations officer for Afghanistan. Mr. Crumpton claimed that the Mazar-i-Sharif would fall with the next “twenty-four to forty-eight hours.”³⁰² As DCI Tenet explained the scene, “not everyone in the room agreed with Hank’s analysis.”³⁰³ In the end, DCI Tenet proved correct with Mazar-i-Sharif falling the next day.

By the end of December 2001, Al Qaida and its Taliban allies were routed from Afghanistan, forced to flee across the border into Pakistan. DCI Tenet and the CIA rose in stature. DCI Tenet was able, under short notice, implement President Bush’s directive to attack Al Qaida after September 11, 2001. DCI Tenet’s confidence in the CIA also

²⁹⁸ George Tenet, 216.

²⁹⁹ George Tenet, 217.

³⁰⁰ George Tenet, 217.

³⁰¹ George Tenet, 217.

³⁰² George Tenet, 217.

³⁰³ George Tenet, 217.

rose. While the clandestine service preformed successfully, the analytical side, neglected by DCI Tenet, would stumble during the Iraq War debate.

DCI TENT AND IRAQ WAR POLICY IN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

Undermining U.S. Intelligence for the Iraq War

The Iraq War presented a unique challenge to U.S. Intelligence as the Vietnam War did in the 1960's. In the Vietnam War, persistent negative assessments by the IC resulted in policymakers ignoring the intelligence. In the case of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) stockpiles, the IC, on a consistent basis, provided supporting information that bolstered the case for war against Iraq. Added to this were DCI Tenet's actions. In several instances during the debate, DCI Tenet sided with policymakers against intelligence professionals. As DCI McCone undermined the IC by getting them to side with him against policymakers, DCI Tenet undermined the IC by the opposite effect.

The Iraq WMD Debate. After Operation DESERT STORM, Saddam Hussein and Iraq remained a major foreign policy problem for the U.S. During the 1990's, the U.S. adopted a policy of isolating Iraq through United Nations sanctions. The threat posed by Saddam to his neighbors required the U.S. to maintain a military presence in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, and subsequent operations in Afghanistan in 2002, the Bush Administration relooked the threat posed by

Saddam. In arguing the case for war, the Bush Administration used the threat of Iraq's WMD stockpile as a justification for invasion.

Intelligence during this time supported the case for war. Throughout the 1990's the IC concluded that Iraq had a WMD stockpile. Unable to find evidence to contradict their analytical conclusions, the IC remained steadfast in their assessment on Iraq's WMD capabilities. DCI Tenet was at the center of this debate on Iraq. While DCI Tenet refrained from being an advocate for a particular policy such as in the case of DCI McCone, DCI Tenet did provide intelligence that only served to reinforce the preconceived policy that Saddam Hussein was an imminent threat to the United States.

In justifying the war, the Bush Administration focused its case on Iraq's WMD threat. Using already established intelligence, the administration made concrete allegations against Saddam. The most vocal advocate for war was Vice President Richard Cheney. Vice President Cheney presented a case for war to policymakers by "overstat[ing] the intelligence," available.³⁰⁴ At times this presented a challenge to DCI Tenet. In August 2002, Vice President Cheney made an emphatic statement, in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that Iraq had WMD.³⁰⁵ Vice President Cheney's statement was never cleared with CIA. As DCI Tenet remarked, the statement "went well beyond what our analysis could support."³⁰⁶ However, in his desire to remain influential in the Bush Administration, he never challenged Cheney's remarks. While he shied away from correcting policymakers, he was not shy in challenging intelligence professionals if they contradicted policymakers.

³⁰⁴ George Tenet, 315.

³⁰⁵ George Tenet, 315.

³⁰⁶ George Tenet, 315.

In October 2002, statements made by President Bush and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DDCI) John McLaughlin appeared to contradict each other on Iraq's imminent threat. On October 2, 2002, DDCI McLaughlin testified before the SSCI, in closed session, that the threat of an attack by Saddam was low.³⁰⁷ On October 7, 2002, in a major address to the nation, President Bush argued that Iraq was an immediate threat to the U.S. When DDCI McLaughlin's statements were released to the public, the two statements did not reconcile with one another. On orders from the White House, DCI Tenet gave a public statement that refuted the contention of DDCI McLaughlin.³⁰⁸ DCI Tenet sided with policymakers in this dispute, undermining his second in command.

In the Fall of 2002, while the Congress was debating the authorization for the use of force against Iraq, the IC was asked to provide a NIE on the state of Iraq's WMD. Like NIE 53-63, the October 2002 Iraq NIE, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program*, was extremely important to policymakers. The Iraq NIE presented the case to policymakers that Iraq did possess WMD. The NIE's key judgments were emphatic on Iraq's WMD program. The NIE concluded that:

Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions; if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade.³⁰⁹

The certitude of the key judgments confirmed "everything the White House was

³⁰⁷ George Tenet, 335.

³⁰⁸ Tim Weiner, 486.

³⁰⁹ U.S. Director for Central Intelligence, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program*, National Intelligence Council (Washington D.C., 2003), 1.

saying”³¹⁰ on Iraq. Based on the findings in the NIE, Congress authorized the President to use force against Iraq. As in the case of NIE 53-63, the failure to find Iraq’s WMD proved the key judgments to have “been stunningly wrong.”³¹¹ Like in the Vietnam War, the confidence in national intelligence by policymakers was lost during the Iraq War.

DCI Tenet’s early failure to concentrate on the analytical aspect of the CIA contributed to undermining the intelligence effort. DCI Tenet never pushed for the IC to produce a quality product on Iraq’s WMD program. While a normal NIE takes about six months to complete, the Iraq NIE was completed in three weeks. DCI Tenet admitted, in his memoirs, that he did not think a NIE “was necessary.”³¹² With a condensed timeline, the quality of the work was poor. CIA incorporated information from various documents and assembled them into the NIE.³¹³ As one author described the NIE, the CIA had “produced the worst body of work in its long history.”³¹⁴ After reviewing all available data, the SSCI published its report on July 9, 2004 that took to task the IC for the poor quality of the NIE. Every judgment made in the NIE, the SSCI concluded, was not supported by information available to the IC. While the NIE damaged the IC and DCI Tenet’s reputation, his actions contributed to his fall.

After the fall of Saddam, the U.S. was unprepared for the chaos that ensued. Into that void an insurgency fueled by Al Qaida, Sunni, and Shiite militants emerged. Throughout the remainder of 2003 and into 2004, the U.S. struggled to contain the Iraqi

³¹⁰ Tim Weiner, 487.

³¹¹ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 52.

³¹² George Tenet, 322.

³¹³ George Tenet, 322.

³¹⁴ Tim Weiner, 487.

insurgency. Much like the Vietnam analysis, CIA analysis of post-Saddam Iraq was pessimistic. Even prior to the start of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, CIA assessed that the situation after initial combat operations would be difficult. As DCI Tenet explains, the CIA accurately predicted the outbreak of an insurgency within Iraq.³¹⁵ From an analysis done in January 2003, the CIA concluded that after the initial euphoria of the removal of Saddam, the Iraqis would turn against the U.S. occupation.³¹⁶ CIA continued to provide this same outlook throughout 2004. In response to these assessments, President Bush publically dismissed the findings. On September 22, 2004, President Bush claimed that analysts “were just guessing.”³¹⁷ President Bush’s rather dismissive statement illustrates the loss of confidence in U.S. intelligence.

DCI Tenet’s Fall.

For DCI Tenet, while the NIE incident was a disaster for the IC, his personal assurance to President Bush overstepped the bounds of solid analysis. On December 21, 2002, DDCI McLoughlin briefed President Bush on the CIA’s evidence for Iraq’s WMD Program. While the NIE made a definitive statement on the existence of WMDs, the brief to President Bush underwhelmed him. President Bush commented that the evidence was lacking. In his personal guarantee, DCI Tenet made the fatal comment “Slam Dunk,”³¹⁸ to the President. DCI Tenet, in his memoirs, attempted to explain away the comment, citing how this was made “ten months after the president saw the first

³¹⁵ George Tenet, 426.

³¹⁶ George Tenet, 424-425.

³¹⁷ The White House, “President Bush Meets with Prime Minister Allawi in New York Tuesday,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/09/20040921-9.html> (accessed May 28, 2008).

³¹⁸ George Tenet, 359.

workable war plan for Iraq,”³¹⁹ for instance. In reality, DCI Tenet provided the needed justification for going to war. In the words of White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, once DCI Tenet made his statement, it was “the confirmation,”³²⁰ policymakers needed. DCI Tenet staked his reputation as well as the reputation of the entire IC on the existence of Iraq’s WMD. With the head of the IC vouching for the intelligence, it was all the confirmation President Bush needed to invade Iraq.

DCI Tenet not only undermined intelligence in front of U.S. policymakers but also in the eyes of the world. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s flawed UN speech on Iraq’s WMD in February 2003 was based on intelligence provided by CIA. It was Secretary Powell’s mission to argue the case for action against Iraq to the UN. Over the course of several days in February 2003, Secretary Powell, DCI Tenet, and CIA analysts worked on the speech. At times they were in conflict with Vice President Cheney’s office. Aides within the Vice President’s office pushed to include material not substantiated by the CIA.³²¹ According to DCI Tenet, the goal “from beginning to end was to come up with rhetoric that was both supported by underlying intelligence and worthy of what we all hoped would be a defining moment.”³²² At the conclusion of these sessions, DCI Tenet believed they had “produced a solid product.”³²³ Secretary Powell delivered his speech to the UN with DCI Tenet sitting behind him. DCI Tenet’s presence demonstrated another facet in confirming all the assumptions made by the U.S. against

³¹⁹ George Tenet, 359.

³²⁰ Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*, (New York: Free Press, 2007), 186.

³²¹ George Tenet, 373.

³²² George Tenet, 373.

³²³ George Tenet, 374.

Iraq. In the end, the speech was flawed, with each assertion made undermined by facts on the ground. DCI Tenet succinctly summed up the results of the speech's failure, the "nation's credibility plummeted."³²⁴ While it damaged the U.S.'s credibility it also damaged DCI Tenet's credibility with other policymakers.

No WMD were found in Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003. DCI Tenet's position became tenuous within the administration. In order to divert attention away from the President and policymakers on the failure to find Iraq's WMD, the burden was placed on DCI Tenet and the IC. On several occasions, he was forced to shoulder the blame that could have been shared by other policymakers. The most striking example was the claim that Iraq sought uranium from Niger.³²⁵ President Bush made this accusation in his 2003 State of the Union address. In time this statement proved false. Instead of sharing the blame as the National Security Council was responsible for coordinating the draft of the speech prior to its delivery, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice shifted the blame to DCI Tenet. In placing the blame on DCI Tenet, Rice was able to undermine his position within the White House. As DCI Tenet relays "when reporters start asking if the president still has confidence in you, you know you are in trouble."³²⁶ Marginalized within the administration, DCI Tenet resigned in July 2004. He was the second to last person to hold the position of DCI. Peter Goss, former chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, became DCI in 2004. He lasted in the position until 2006 when the position of DNI was established.

³²⁴ George Tenet, 374.

³²⁵ Tim Weiner, 490.

³²⁶ George Tenet, 464.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter reexamines the research question and hypothesis posed at the beginning of the thesis. Next, this chapter answers the key questions used to focus the research question. Based on key findings, this chapter then presents several recommendations on ensuring the effectiveness of the DNI in light of the lessons learned from DCI McCone's tenure. Finally, this chapter examines potential future research in the understanding of leadership.

HYPOTHESIS AND KEY QUESTIONS

Hypothesis Examined

This thesis looked at the role the head of the IC needs to play in the development of American foreign policy. The head of the IC can either be a policy advocate or policy neutral. In determining his proper role a delicate balance is needed. When examining the tenure of John McCone as DCI, he overstepped his role as an intelligence leader and inserted himself too deeply in policy formulation.

In examining his role during the time period of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, DCI McCone's role expanded from initially focusing on intelligence

matters and how they relate to policy to advocating, forcefully, a policy that was at odds with other policymakers and the President. As the hypothesis addressed, as a policy advocate, DCI John McCone lost his ability to be an effective leader of the Intelligence Community during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

Key Question Examination

To further examine the validity of this hypotheses the following key questions were asked and examined:

1. Did DCI McCone undermine the IC by providing his own analysis or pressuring analysts to change theirs?

Yes. DCI McCone, several times during his tenure, relied on his own analysis in discussions with policymakers. Often that analysis was at odds with his analysts. As in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone saw the intelligence in terms he understood. Throughout the summer and fall 1962, DCI McCone and analysts in the IC presented two different interpretations of the same intelligence to policymakers. In arguing his case, DCI McCone undermined the analysis of the IC. From a policymaker's perspective, if the head of the IC questions the analysis of the IC why should the policymaker believe the analysis. In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, although DCI McCone alone assessed, correctly, the Soviet threat, he did long-term damage to the IC's credibility. The PFIAB's report severely criticized the method of analysis made by the IC, which DCI McCone never disputed, but reminding the President he was correct in his assessment. In being proven right with respect to Soviet intentions, DCI McCone

diminished the confidence in the analysis of the IC by senior members of the Kennedy Administration. Undermining his analysts in the eyes of policymakers had a detrimental consequence as the IC continued to provide negative assessments of selected policies with regards to Vietnam. DCI McCone's attempt to reconcile the difference between the analyst and the policymakers was met with disastrous results in early 1963.

DCI McCone's order to rewrite NIE 53-63 attempted to reconcile the difference in opinion between analysts and policymakers. Overreacting to accusations that the CIA provided poor analysis to policymakers during the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone forced his analysts to accept the views of policymakers. In denying the ability of analysts to provide unbiased reporting, DCI McCone exposed the CIA to a case of politicization of the intelligence. By allowing policymakers to determine what was going to be placed in the NIE, DCI McCone lost his creditability when the situation in South Vietnam invalidated the key findings of NIE 53-63. In the end, DCI McCone had to authorize the publication of a subsequent SNIE to correct the mistakes in NIE 53-63.

2. Did DCI McCone attempt to sway intelligence analysis to support his position if at odds with accepted policy?

Yes. DCI McCone in his final days pushed the IC to support him in his debates with other policymakers about the course to follow in Vietnam. By 1965, DCI McCone was a strong advocate of his position of a large air campaign against North Vietnam. At the same time he constantly critiqued the policy advocated by President Johnson and Secretary McNamara. While policymakers requested the IC examine the possible outcomes of the President's policy, DCI McCone also directed the IC to determine

potential endstates following his policy. Presenting IC analysis to policymakers that supported his position on an intensified air campaign against North Vietnam undermined the objectivity of the IC. With policymakers already ignoring DCI McCone's recommendations and seeing the IC analysis skewed towards the DCI position only served to isolate the IC from policymakers.

3. Was his position undermined by other policymakers within the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson?

Yes. DCI McCone was clearly an outsider in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. On occasions his views of the Cold War and the role the United States should play were at odds with other policymakers. DCI McCone's interaction with these policymakers was the basis for the strained relations.

His poor relations with National Security Advisor Bundy and Secretary of Defense McNamara furthered his isolation. As part of the National Security Council, DCI McCone's actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis undermined himself with Bundy, who did not like to be reminded that he was wrong on Cuba. Alienating Bundy resulted in DCI McCone losing a potential ally within the White House that could advocate for his position.

As DCI McCone's influence fell, Secretary McNamara's influence rose. By 1965, Secretary McNamara became the dominant policy adviser in the Johnson Administration, controlling Vietnam policy. While DCI McCone maintained a position close to Secretary McNamara, he did have a measure of success in the policy; however,

once he moved away from Secretary McNamara, DCI McCone had no allies in the White House to provide any level of support for his position.

4. Was his relationship with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson undermined by his own actions?

Yes. In working for two Presidents as head of the IC, DCI McCone clearly enjoyed the working relationship he had with President Kennedy as opposed to the working relationship he had with President Johnson. The access he had with President Kennedy, who appreciated what the IC provided, allowed DCI McCone to maintain some level of influence. In the transition to President Johnson, DCI McCone tried to replicate the interaction he had with President Kennedy. While at first President Johnson may have wanted a good working relation with his head of the IC, DCI McCone's over aggressive approach alienated him.

DCI McCone assumed that President Johnson welcomed his opinion until it was too late. Once President Johnson disregarded DCI McCone's policy advice it also marginalized the IC. Without listening to the judgments of the IC, President Johnson committed himself along a path that the IC continuously advised would lead to, at best a stalemate, and at worse defeat for the United States.

KEY FINDINGS

Introduction

DCI McCone started his tenure as head of the IC in a strong position. He successfully positioned himself to be a leader of the IC and not just a manager. In doing so, he forcefully advocated his position to policymakers. Paradoxically this advocacy weakened him within the administrations he served. There are several factors that contributed to DCI McCone losing influence within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. DCI McCone diminished influence had a cascading effect throughout the IC.

Key Findings

1. Being a policy advocate only served to marginalize DCI McCone within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. The implication of the head of the IC being marginalized is that it will also marginalize the IC. Timely and, as in the case of Vietnam, accurate analysis provided by the IC will be discarded by policymakers. Ignoring the IC, policymakers will use their own assessment to determine the potential outcomes of an approved policy. In this event, policymakers will adjust their analysis to ensure the policy will succeed.
2. DCI McCone's failure to work effectively with other members of the National Security Council isolated him within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Each organization within the national security apparatus wants to ensure they are providing the

best advice and analysis to support a given policy. In the end the collective judgment outweighs the individual's. The head of the IC is in a delicate position as he/she is in competition for the President's ear from other policymakers. With no advocates supporting his/her position within the national security structure, the views of the head of the IC can be either ignored or twisted in a way to show that he/she is in opposition to approved policy.

3. The head of the IC's position was weakened once the DCI became another political appointee. Serving at the pleasure of the President is difficult if your analysis shows the President's policy will fail. In order to maintain influence with the President, the head of the IC may be forced to amend or suppress dissenting assessments from the IC. By presenting to policymakers what they want to hear, intelligence assessments become worthless and only serve to parrot the approved policy.

4. DCI McCone undermined the IC's analysis with policymakers either by offering his own contradictory analysis or forcing the IC to change its analytical conclusions. The head of the IC is in a delicate position when offering his/her own analysis to the President. If not in concurrence with the assessments of the IC, the DCI's separate conclusions only serves to undermine the IC. The President may just rely on the assessment of the head of the IC instead of the assessment of the entire IC. In those events the IC becomes neutered, unable to exert any influence in developing the "right" policies. If the analysis of the head of the IC proves wrong, the President not only may ignore the head of the IC but also the analysis of the IC as well.

5. Leadership is a trait that needs to be taught within the IC. Intelligence professionals have an aversion to assuming a leadership role. The head of the IC is only effective when he/she can marshal the entire resources of the IC behind him/her. Backing up the head of the IC is the measured, unbiased analysis of the IC. A strong leader can use these assets to present to policymakers the potential outcomes of a policy. A strong leader can work across the national security apparatus and build an effective working relationships with key figures. A strong leader can also assert himself/herself into policy debates without overreaching as in the case of DCI McCone. Finally, a strong leader can stand up for the IC against dissenting opinions of policymakers, unlike in the case of DCI Tenet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

DCI McCone's role in policy development presents a case of overreaching. DCI McCone's actions only served to alienate him and undermine the IC. Studying the case of DCI McCone will give intelligence professionals and future leaders an understanding that the role of intelligence in policymaking is a difficult one. Human nature will almost certainly force an individual to interject his or her views into a policy debate if they question the policy being implemented. This puts intelligence professionals in a delicate position. Intelligence professionals need to find the right balance between advocacy and neutrality. Intelligence professionals can and will be undermined if they take their role to

either extreme. To guard against that situation, the IC needs to strengthen its position in the policymaking process. The DNI must be the one to do this first. The DNI must work to get the business of intelligence above partisan politics. The strengthened position of the DNI will enhance the ability of the IC to provide unbiased analysis on policy and be accepted by policymakers.

1. Establish a fixed term for the DNI.

The weakened position of the head of the IC began in the 1970's when President Carter failed to follow precedent and keep the incumbent DCI in office. Tying a DCI to a new administration only serves to make the position a political reward. Serving the interest of the current administration does not, necessarily, serve the interest of the nation. Intelligence and the support it provides to policy is a long-term process. Linking the DNI to an administration forces the IC to focus on short-term needs to the neglect of long-term interests. As an example, DNI Mitch McConnell's efforts to integrate the IC's networks prior to the conclusion of the Bush Administration are being rushed. The underlining assumption is the hope that the next administration will accept what has been accomplished and carry on with integration as its goal. If the DNI had a fixed term then rushing through projects will end. The DNI can take a long-term view in the interests of the community and nation.

Establishing a fixed term for presidential appointees is not out of the norm. For instance, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, who manages the U.S. economy, serves a fixed term of four years, with the potential for successive reappointments. In the national security structure two key positions have fixed terms. The Director of the Federal Bureau

of Investigation serves a fixed term of ten years with no ability for reappointment. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff serves a fixed term of two years, with the opportunity for one additional reappointment. Making the position of DNI a fixed term will produce several positive effects.

The length of the DNI's term must be sufficiently long enough to allow for the DNI to concentrate on the needs of the IC, but not too long where his/her analysis becomes stale. The ideal length should be five years. Not only will the DNI serve a two-term President well, it also allows for a smooth transition to a new administration. First, it allows for the DNI to crossover between administrations maintaining a level of continuity in the national security apparatus. Second, the length also gives the new President the opportunity to establish intelligence goals and receive advice from a seasoned DNI in a deliberate manner. Third, it also gives the new President time to either reappoint the current DNI or seek a new DNI. The DNI should be limited to only one reappointment. In the case of DCI McCone, he served almost five years. In that time he was able to establish his authority over the IC.

2. Support unbiased IC analysis.

The dilemma faced by an intelligence professional can be summed up in the following scenario. After going through levels of vetting in the IC's bureaucracy, the DNI presents an analyst's key conclusions to the President or a senior policymaker. However, in offering the analysis, the DNI claims not to believe it and proceeds to offer his own analysis. The IC's credibility is lost to the policymaker. In the case of DCI

McCone, he used either the IC's analysis to back up his policy recommendations or provide his own analysis if he did not agree with the analytical conclusions.

The McCone and Tenet cases show how each DCI undermined the IC, causing long-term damage to the credibility of the IC. During DCI McCone's tenure, he undercut the IC's analysis. During the Cuban Missile Crisis he offered his own competing analysis to policymakers. During the Vietnam War, DCI McCone undercut the IC by insisting that NIE 53-63 reflect the views of the policymakers instead of the views of the analysts. The end result was a flawed NIE where the key judgments were invalidated within a month of its release in April 1963. Even the Iraq NIE exposed DCI Tenet to undermining IC analysis. His statements to President Bush about the certitude of Iraq's WMD, destroyed the credibility of the IC when no WMD was found.

A recent example shows how the head of the IC should support the IC's analysis. On December 3, 2007, the IC published the Iran NIE, entitled *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, on Iran's nuclear program. The NIE concluded that Iran had not restarted its nuclear program since 2003. At the time of its release, the Bush Administration had attempted to present a case of an impending threat posed by Iran. The NIE appeared to contradict the position of policymakers. DNI McConnell, instead of offering his own conclusion or force the analysts to side with policymakers, maintained his own impartiality. While policymakers complained, no one seriously questioned the NIE judgments because DNI McConnell was not pushing his own agenda on Iran. The credibility of the DNI and the IC are linked. A lose in credibility in one will result in the other losing its credibility.

3. Work to build effective relations with members of the National Security Council.

The DNI, in order to be effective, must work closely with two key figures in any administration: the National Security Advisor, who can be the key advocate for the DNI within the White House and the Secretary of Defense, whose view on foreign policy matters, especially in times of war, hold more sway over others. While no relationship is perfect, the need to educate these two on the importance of intelligence and its fundamental role in American foreign policy belongs to the DNI. DCI McCone failed to understand or appreciate the importance of these two individuals. DCI McCone seemed at times to believe he was more important than Bundy and a co-equal with Secretary McNamara.

The Defense Department's establishment of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence (USDI) is an excellent example of tying the needs of the DNI with the Secretary of Defense. The USDI not only serves the Secretary but he is also dual-hatted to serve the DNI. This position effectively links the two organizational leaders together. A similar model can be set up for the NSC. The National Security Advisor should establish a permanent position on the NSC specifically focused on intelligence matters. While the DNI serves the needs of the President, the intelligence advisor on the NSC staff can serve the needs of the National Security Advisor. The intelligence advisor on the NSC staff should serve in the same capacity as the USDI. First, this individual would be the principal assistant to the National Security Advisor answering intelligence-related

matters. As the principal assistant, the advisor can educate the National Security Advisor on the capabilities of the IC and relay information between the Advisor and the DNI.

Second, with concurrence from the DNI, this individual would serve as the liaison between the NSC and the IC, filtering information to the proper agency. Third, from his position on the NSC staff, the intelligence advisor can relay pressing issues to the DNI that arises in NSC meetings that do not involve the principals.

4. Establish a Leadership Block of Instructions at the National Defense Intelligence College.

Leadership is an important quality that should be studied. Leadership is not the sole property of the operators. Courses on leadership are taught at the Service Academies as well as the Staff Colleges for each of the Services. While the focus of training leadership is on the combat officer, its function is just as important in the intelligence field. In some aspects, DCI McCone was effective because he considered himself a leader and not a manager. In the realm of intelligence, senior personnel consider themselves managers first, not leaders. There is a natural apprehension against striving to take the leadership mantle. Also, historically there is a structural problem in denying the head of the IC a leadership role. From 1947 until 2006, when the DCI headed the IC, the only real authority he had was over CIA. DCI's took two approaches to the rest of the community. In the case of DCI McCone, he attempted to lead it while DCI Tenet ignored the IC and focused on running CIA.

The National Defense Intelligence College (NDIC) should establish a curriculum focusing on leadership training, similar to the model used in the staff colleges. The U.S.

Army Command & General Staff Colleges curriculum on leadership starts with a foundation course, then examines leadership and organizations, finally it goes through several case studies on leadership. One course cannot cover the challenges faced by leaders in the IC today. The program needs to be a series of courses, extending across NDIC's academic year, much like the Denial & Deception (D&D) program.³²⁷ The courses should be geared towards the intelligence professional and future leaders of the IC.

The first course should lay the building block for the study of leadership. It should incorporate the concepts of critical thinking as well as give a historical overview of the IC in order to understand today's challenges faced by the IC. The second course should examine leaders and organizations. This course should cover the challenges IC leaders face in managing large and complex organizations. It should also look at how leaders interact with one another to establish effective communications across the IC and national security apparatus. The final course should be a series of case studies. This course should examine how individual heads of the IC managed their responsibilities and how they led the IC. This course should examine where they succeeded and where they met challenges. More importantly, these courses should serve as a guide post for future IC leaders.

³²⁷ The D&D program is a series of courses that span the entire academic year at NDIC. The four courses offered under the D&D program cover the entire spectrum of foreign denial and deception. At the conclusion of the program, students receive a certificate from the Foreign Denial and Deception Committee (FDDC).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Leadership is a key element for all intelligence professionals. However, the DNI is considered more of a manager for the IC than its leader. As an example, no one claims that the Secretary of Defense manages the Defense Department, he leads the Defense Department. Like the Secretary of Defense, the DNI heads a large diverse organization. Future studies should examine how the DNI can become a more effective leader of the IC.

In the coming years, future DNIs will continue to define their position. Each DNI will take a different approach to managing the IC and how they interact with policymakers. Each DNI will bring their strengths and weaknesses to the position. Since DCI McCone, there have been few appointments to the head of the IC that did not have some background in intelligence-related matters. One area to observe is the background of the DNI. A DNI who comes from a non-intelligence background may move towards the DCI McCone model of policy involvement. DNIs with intelligence-related background may become adverse to policy involvement.

For the future, researchers should examine how a DNI view his/her role in policy development. The DNI's background is a valid starting point to determine how a DNI will participate in policy discussions. Further research should examine whether the DNI takes an expansive view of his or her leadership of the IC. Some DNIs may attempt to maintain a narrow view, controlling those areas under his or her direct management, like in the case of DCI Tenet. For some DNIs, they may follow DCI McCone's method and attempt to assert their control over the entire IC.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined DCI McCone's role in policymaking during the Vietnam War era. DCI McCone, initially, saw his role in policymaking as policy neutral. However, his natural inclination was to become actively involved in policy debates. In the years he served as DCI, he forced his way into many of the policy discussions of the time. In some cases, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, he was somewhat successful. With Vietnam, his advice was ignored. He pushed the wrong policy prescription on policymakers. While he believed he was doing the right thing, his methods only served to marginalize him within the administrations he served. In today's complex geo-strategic environment, the DNI and the IC needs to determine its role in policy formulation. Finding the right balance will go a long way in ensuring that the DNI and the IC maintain its credibility with policymakers.

APPENDIX A

LETTER FROM DCI MCCONE TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON APRIL 28, 1965

Dear Mr. President:

I remain concerned, as I have said before to you, Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara, over the limited scale of air action against North Vietnam which we envision for the next few months.

Specifically I feel that we must conduct our bombing attacks in a manner that will begin to hurt North Vietnam badly enough to cause the Hanoi regime to seek a political way out through negotiation rather than expose their economy to increasingly serious levels of destruction. By limiting our attacks to targets like bridges, military installations and lines of communication, in effect we signal to the Communists that our determination to win is significantly modified by our fear of widening the war.

In these circumstances the Communists are likely to feel they can afford to accept a considerable amount of bomb damage while they improve their air defenses and step up their insurgency in South Vietnam. If they take this line of action, in the next few months they can present us with an ever-increasing guerrilla war against the reinforced Viet Cong in terrain and circumstances favorable to the Communists.

If this situation develops and lasts several months or more, I feel world opinion will turn against us, Communist propaganda will become increasingly effective, and indeed domestic support of our policy may erode.

I therefore urge that as we deploy additional troops, which I believe necessary, we concurrently hit the north harder and inflict greater damage. In my opinion, we should strike their petroleum supplies, electric power installations, and air defense installations (including the SAM sites which are now being built). I do not think we have to fear taking on the MIG's, which after all the ChiNats defeated in 1958 with F-86's and Sidewinders.

I am not talking about bombing centers of population or killing innocent people, though there will of course be some casualties. I am proposing to "tighten the tourniquet" on North Vietnam so as to make the Communists pause to weigh the losses they are taking against their prospects for gains. We should make it hard for the Viet Cong to win in the south and simultaneously hard for Hanoi to endure our attacks in the north.

I believe this course of action holds out the greatest promise we can hope for in our effort to attain our ultimate objective of finding a political solution to the Vietnam problem. This view follows logically, it seems to me, from our National Intelligence Estimate of 18 February 1965, which concludes that the Hanoi regime would be more likely than not to make an effort to "secure a respite" by some political move when and if, but not before, a

sustained U.S. program of air attacks is damaging important economic or military assets in North Vietnam.

Respectfully yours,

John A. McCone³²⁸

³²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "279. Letter From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Johnson," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed June 10, 2008).

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ABSTRACT

TITLE OF THESIS: The Rise and Fall of John McCone

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The head of the Intelligence Community (IC) has an undefined role in the development of U.S. foreign policy. This leads to a problem whether the head of the IC should be a policy advocate or policy neutral. Each method has its problems. Historically, the heads of the IC have strived to remain policy neutral. When a head tries to be a policy advocate it has only led to disastrous results. The research question asked was how should the head of the IC be involved with the development of U.S. foreign policy?

John A. McCone, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) from 1961 to 1965 was one IC head that chose to be a policy advocate. During his tenure as DCI, Mr. McCone interjected his views on policy with policymakers of the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Administrations. Centered on the debates of Vietnam War policy, DCI McCone advocated a position that was at odds with other policymakers. While policymakers sought a policy to contain U.S. involvement, DCI McCone advocated an expansive approach to the conflict. As a result, he lost influence and damaged the credibility of the IC.

This thesis traced DCI McCone's role in policy development during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Using primary source documentation, a thorough analysis was made of DCI McCone's role in the policy debates on Vietnam. This research finds that DCI McCone overstepped his role as head of the IC. DCI McCone was a constant critic of administration policy towards the Vietnam War. This only served to undermine his position with policymakers. At the same time, the IC provided objective analysis questioning the optimistic assessment of policymakers. With DCI McCone's position undermined it carried over to the IC. Before 1965, policymakers chose to ignore intelligence assessments that contradicted their own assessment.

DCI McCone's performance in policy formulation serves as a warning to today's IC professional. IC professionals that attempt to become an assertive policy advocate will in the end be marginalized. This will not only have a negative effect on their influence but will be detrimental for the IC as a whole.

THE RISE AND FALL OF JOHN MCCONE

by

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Unclassified thesis submitted to the faculty
of the National Defense Intelligence College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and
do not reflect the official policy or position of the
Department of Defense or the U.S. Government

DEDICATION

To Major John Mowchan, for his patience.

To Major Jesse Back for his help and the chance to work with him back at Fort Lewis, Washington.

To my family, Wendy, Megan, Alyssa, Dominic and Stefanie, who have put up with me for the last 10 years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THESIS OVERVIEW

Topic

One of the most difficult positions to fill in United States national security is the head of the Intelligence Community (IC). In this position the head of the IC stands at the nexus of intelligence and policymaking. In that role the head of the IC must determine what level of involvement he or she will have with foreign policy formulation. The Director can either be a policy advocate or remain policy neutral.

Throughout the history of the IC, there have been examples of the head of the IC performing either one or both of these roles. Historically, intelligence leaders who are policy advocates become isolated by other members of the national security apparatus within an administration. As a result of the Director's isolation, the IC suffers, since the analysis provided is often discarded by policymakers.

Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) John A. McCone was an example of a DCI being a policy advocate. John McCone served as DCI from 1961 to 1965, spanning the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. DCI McCone interjected himself into the foreign policy debates of both administrations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role played by DCI McCone in foreign policy formulation within both

of these administrations and determine the effects of his involvement on intelligence matters.

Today's IC professional should study the case of DCI McCone. With the recent establishment of the Director for National Intelligence (DNI), strong leadership is a necessary quality. The DNI also needs to find his or her proper role in policy debates within the administration they are supporting. The example of DCI McCone shows that if the DNI overreaches in policy debates, the effects will ripple throughout the IC. Not only will the DNI loose influence but also the IC. The case of DCI McCone should stand as a sober reminder to IC professionals as to what happens when the head of the IC loses influence.

Research Question

The Issue. At the senior levels of government, intelligence professionals face two dilemmas when it comes to the support they provide for U.S. foreign policy goals. Intelligence professionals can either be a policy advocate or policy neutral. Each approach has its own risks for the intelligence professional. Whether the IC professional fully embraces the policy or openly dissents, they may be accused of manipulating intelligence to support their own position. If they remain neutral, they provide unbiased reports on the problems with the policy but may be accused of offering nothing constructive to remedy the situation. Intelligence professionals during the Vietnam War faced these dilemmas.

The early 1960's was a turbulent time for the IC and DCI McCone. Coming into office as DCI in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961, DCI McCone had to

work to regain the confidence and trust for national intelligence by senior officials serving in the John F. Kennedy Administration. John McCone was at the heart of several foreign policy formulation debates that affected the nation as a whole including the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the proper U.S. role in Vietnam from 1963 to 1965.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone showed a tendency to become involved with policy formulation, arguing his point not only to other members of the National Security Council but to the President directly. While the Cuban Missile Crisis was short lived, it did illustrate the methods DCI McCone used to insert himself in policy debates. These methods came to light during the debates leading up to the decision by Lyndon Johnson to commit large U.S. military forces to defend South Vietnam in the summer of 1965.

While working to regain the confidence of senior political officials, DCI McCone, with the backing from the IC, became heavily involved in the policy debate on the correct course of action for Vietnam. From 1961-1965, the IC produced over 40 national and special intelligence estimates on the situation in Vietnam. The estimates were generally pessimistic and argued that policies of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations of gradual escalatory violence against the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnam were not succeeding. Competing against these national intelligence estimates were positive reports from the State and Defense Departments, as well as senior U.S. officials in Vietnam, such as the U.S. Ambassador and U.S. military commanders, that the current policies were succeeding. Leading the intelligence side of the debate was DCI McCone.

Throughout the escalatory period from 1961-1965, John McCone consistently argued that the current policy of a gradual escalation against North Vietnam could not

succeed and a more aggressive approach was needed. As John McCone was advocating for a new policy, he influenced Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analysts to provide analysis to support his position in the debate. In the end, President Johnson chose “to take the appraisal of the situation from his Secretary of Defense and his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs rather than the appraisal of the intelligence analysts.”¹ Marginalized, DCI McCone resigned in April 1965, unable to stop policymakers from adopting a policy that only led to a stalemate in Vietnam.

The Research Question. How should the head of the IC be involved with the development of U.S. foreign policy?

The Hypothesis and the Key Questions

The Hypothesis. As a policy advocate, DCI John McCone lost his ability to be an effective leader of the Intelligence Community during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

Key Questions. The following key questions will help answer the research question.

1. Did DCI McCone undermine the IC by providing his own analysis or pressuring analysts to change theirs?
2. Did DCI McCone attempt to sway intelligence analysis to support his position if at odds with accepted policy?

¹ John McCone, “Conversations with History,” Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley,” <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/McCone/mccone-con0.html> (accessed October 9, 2007). Hereafter cited as John McCone, Berkley interview.

3. Was his position undermined by other policymakers within the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson?

4. Was his relationship with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson undermined by his own actions?

Related Literature

Introduction. The literature of the Vietnam Era, from primary and secondary sources, covers in great detail the policy debates Kennedy and Johnson administration officials had on the course to follow. Most of the literature focuses primarily on the operational side of the debate; the role intelligence played is discussed from either former intelligence officials or from scholars who focused on intelligence. DCI McCone's role is unique. DCI McCone was a big believer in keeping a written record and many of the memorandums he wrote on specific topics or a summarization of a meeting he participated in are captured in the U.S. Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series. While DCI McCone wrote extensively of his involvement, he never wrote a memoir to capture his experience. In many of the secondary sourced literature that focus on Vietnam policy development, DCI McCone makes sporadic appearances; however, the literature does consistently cover one dramatic appearance. DCI McCone is regularly quoted, during April 1965, arguing against the policy of a gradual escalation of force against North Vietnam. DCI McCone argued for a more aggressive approach and prophesized that the current path would lead to failure. Most of the literature on the April 1965 DCI McCone episode present it as a sign that the policy

the U.S. followed was destined to fail; however, none of the literature provide any analysis on the outcome if the U.S. followed DCI McCone's recommended path.

Primary sources used for this thesis are memorandums and notes, compiled in the *FRUS*, written by officials who participated in the policy debates of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Further primary sources are books and journal articles that give a more detailed examination of DCI McCone's role in the policy debate. Secondary sources are works written by historians who studied the Vietnam War. Although these works do not discuss in detail DCI McCone's role, they place the policy debates in their historical context. These works also give an objective view, removed from the passion of participants, of the Vietnam War.

Primary Sources. One inherent problem in focusing on intelligence-related material and the role it played in foreign policy formulation is the classification issue. Many of the key intelligence participants wrote memoirs during that time. Two principal advisors under DCI McCone wrote memoirs. Richard Helms² wrote *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* and William Colby³ wrote *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA*. The issue with their accounts is that most of the material they cover is generic, with many of the details needed to support their case still classified, at the time of publication of their memoirs.

² Richard Helms was a career employee of the CIA who rose to the position of DCI (1967 – 1973). Under DCI McCone, Mr. Helms served as Deputy Director for Plans at CIA. In 1966 Mr. Helms became Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

³ William Colby was DCI McCone's principal assistant for Vietnam-related issues. From 1959-1962, Mr. Colby was Chief of Station in Saigon, South Vietnam. From 1962 to 1968, Mr. Colby served as head of the CIA's Far East Division. From 1973 to 1976, Mr. Colby served as DCI.

Most primary information from DCI McCone is compiled in the *FRUS*. Mr. McCone provided one oral interview as part of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library oral history project. The interview given by DCI McCone was conducted in 1972 and only covered topics at a superficial level. Most of the interview examined the relationship DCI McCone had with President Johnson and only gives a broad brush discussion of the CIA's role in Vietnam. The Lyndon B. Johnson Library also captured interviews with other key members of the national security apparatus, such as McGeorge Bundy,⁴ Clifford Clark,⁵ and Robert McNamara.⁶ The roles of Mr. Bundy and Mr. McNamara are the most important as they interacted the most with DCI McCone on policy debates.

The *FRUS* used for this thesis covered the period 1961-1965. The *FRUS* provides good information on policy development for Vietnam during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. The *FRUS* also includes a volume focused specifically on each administration's management of the IC. Many of Mr. McCone's memorandums are a part of these series. At times, DCI McCone's view of events did not reflect other policymakers' views of the same situation. For example, the *FRUS* has memorandums of meetings written by officials within the White House and then includes DCI McCone's memorandum discussing the same meeting. While the White House version downplayed the role DCI McCone had in the meeting, DCI McCone's version leaves the impression he was the central figure in the meeting. Many of these memorandums provide his

⁴ McGeorge Bundy served as the National Security Advisor for both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, from 1961-1966. Mr. Bundy played a key role in Vietnam policy formulation.

⁵ Clark Clifford was a senior policy advisor for several Democratic administrations going back to the administration of President Harry S. Truman. Under President Kennedy, Mr. Clifford served as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board from 1961 and as its chairman from 1963. In 1968, Mr. Clifford served as Secretary of Defense under President Johnson.

⁶ Robert McNamara, in time, became the most dominant Vietnam policy advisor for both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Under both, he served as Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968.

perspective on policy debates as well as his recollections of meetings with senior leaders, such as Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and President Lyndon Johnson.

The Central Intelligence Agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence has added the only accounts that examine Vietnam from the intelligence perspective. In recent years, the CIA declassified all national intelligence estimates related to Vietnam, from 1948 until 1975, and published it as *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*. Although the collection is unabridged, there is no background commentary to put each estimate into its historical context. Also, the unabridged collection does not show the evolution of each estimate from draft to finished product. This source will be used to examine how DCI McCone presented intelligence estimates to policymakers. It will also be used to determine if DCI McCone accurately reflected the assessments of analysts.

Harold P. Ford's *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962-1968*, looks at the intelligence and policy interface during the Vietnam War. While not the central thesis of his book, DCI McCone's role is examined extensively. Mr. Ford is critical of policymakers, arguing that the policymaker ignored intelligence that pointed at the weakness of the accepted policy. Mr. Ford examines three episodes in the Vietnam debate. The first covers the distortion in intelligence reporting, focusing on the rewrite of National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 53-63. The second episode covers the events from 1963 to 1965 that led to President Johnson's decision to commit to an open ended involvement in South Vietnam. The final episode covering the Tet Offensive will not be utilized as it is outside the scope of this thesis. The first two episodes provide information on DCI McCone's role. In the first episode, Mr. Ford gives a critical view of DCI McCone's intervention in the rewriting of NIE 53-63 to reflect the positive outlook

of policymakers. The second episode examines DCI McCone's evolving view of policy and how he argued his policy position with policymakers within the Johnson Administration. On a whole, Mr. Ford is more critical of actions by policymakers than the actions of DCI McCone.

David Robarge's *John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence 1961-1965* is the only all encompassing biography of the tenure of DCI McCone. Mr. Robarge gives a sympathetic view of DCI McCone's tenure. Although his focus is on the management of the IC under DCI McCone, Mr. Robarge does cover the role DCI McCone played in foreign policy formulation. In his discussion, Mr. Robarge presents an image of DCI McCone trying to do the right thing in terms of swaying policymakers to follow a different policy. Mr. Robarge also examines how DCI McCone's personality affected his relationship with other policymakers.

Kenneth J. Campbell's article "John A. McCone: An Outsider Becomes DCI," from the *Studies in Intelligence* was written in 1988. His article is a very uncritical view of DCI McCone, arguing that the success of DCI McCone clearly shows that someone without intelligence experience can succeed as head of the IC. Mr. Campbell also views DCI McCone's role in policy matters as a way to sway policymakers in finding the correct path. Mr. Campbell faults the policymakers, not DCI McCone, for the breakdown between the IC and the policymakers. The one problem with this source is the uncritical examination of DCI McCone's tenure. This source will be used alongside Mr. Robarge's account to examine in depth DCI McCone's tenure.

John Helgerson's book *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates* examines the role the CIA played during the transition between presidents. Chapter three of his book

covers the Kennedy and Johnson period. During the transition to President Johnson, Mr. Helgerson examines not only that transition but also how DCI McCone and the IC suffered under President Johnson's lack of interest in intelligence. According to Mr. Helgerson, the problems about Vietnam caused the rupture between the IC and the President. Further Mr. Helgerson shows that DCI McCone overreached in his relationship with President Johnson, providing him advice that clearly President Johnson did not want to hear. This source will be used to examine how DCI McCone handled the transition to President Johnson. One weakness of the account is that Mr. Helgerson attempts to cover the working relationship between both men in a very short section. It only gives a broad overview of the relationship.

Robert McNamara's *In Retrospect The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* presents the policymaker's side of the argument. Mr. McNamara, looking back on his experience during this time expressed remorse for blindly following a policy that was doomed to fail. He does discuss the break with DCI McCone and although he agreed that DCI McCone's recommendations had its merits, the fear of a wider war, bringing in China, eventually led to it being discarded. One problem with using Mr. McNamara's account is that he wrote his memoir to explain the mistakes made during the Vietnam War. All episodes discussed are from the viewpoint of why the United States should not have done that way. Mr. McNamara does not present his argument from the perspective from when he was there serving as Secretary of Defense. As he was the lead policymaker for the Vietnam War, Secretary McNamara's account demonstrates how he dealt with DCI McCone's policy involvement.

Lyndon Johnson's *The Vantage Point Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969*, only covers the period up to 1965 in two chapters. He presents his relationship with DCI McCone as proper and not the candid advice seeking that others thought the president asked for. President Johnson goes out of his way to explain the reasoning for following the path of the gradual escalation in Vietnam. In the end, President Johnson came to rely on the advice of Robert McNamara to the detriment of the opinions of others around him, namely DCI McCone. The account in his memoirs on the policy discussion on Vietnam from the years 1963-1965 are superficially covered. It was at this time he was building the Great Society program and the Vietnam war was secondary. It was only after 1965 does President Johnson devote more attention to Vietnam. However even in his discussions on the Vietnam War, President Johnson attempts to explain away his decision often pointing to other advisors, like Secretary McNamara, who were the lead agent on Vietnam policy. This source will be used to determine how President Johnson viewed DCI McCone's policy recommendations.

Secondary Sources. Beyond the account of those who directly participated in Vietnam policy debates are other works that sought to take into account the whole time period and not just Washington D.C. In books such as Fredrik Logevall's *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* and Robert Mann's *A Grand Delusion America's Descent into Vietnam*, both authors show how senior officials blindly followed a policy towards conducting the war in Vietnam. Whether policymakers were blinded by an anti-communist view of the world or fear of escalating the war to bring in China or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) the U.S.

failed to achieve success in Vietnam. Each succeeding debate further added to the problem and entangled the U.S. in a quagmire. The issue with finding good quality secondary sources is the lack of attention they give to intelligence-related matters that focus on the years 1961 to 1965. Intelligence did not play a key role in policy development up to 1965. Intelligence plays more of an account after 1965, specifically with issues like the Tet Offensive in 1968, where the use of intelligence was more hotly debated.

Research Design

Research Design. The research design used for this thesis was the historicism method. This method places more importance on using primary source documentation to understand the thoughts and actions of participants in policy debates than on using the long-term view of secondary sources. This method provided for the proper examination of DCI McCone's role in foreign policy formulation as well as the interaction he had with other key individuals. While the head of the IC does have a foreign policy role in terms of the conduct and management of covert actions, the role he played in actual policy debate is undefined. DCI McCone followed his own interpretation for this role.

Data Collection Strategy. This thesis utilized archival research. The U.S. Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series provided the best unclassified primary source documents related to Vietnam. Although these documents do not provide context, the use of the memoirs of key participants plus Mr. Robarge's biography of DCI McCone filled in the context. Supporting the memoirs were the

objective analysis done by researchers, who took a long-term view of Vietnam and how policymakers fumbled into Vietnam.

Analytical Strategy. My analytical strategy first examined the model DCI McCone established for the role intelligence played in policy debates and how that vision translated throughout the IC. Then based off that model, I determined whether DCI McCone followed it in the foreign policy formulation debates of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

Thesis Classification. The focus of the thesis remained at the unclassified level. Since the early 1990's, information pertaining to discussions within the Kennedy and Johnson Administration became available through the declassification process. This information was compiled in the *FRUS*. These documents open a window into the policy debates at the time. For intelligence-specific material, in the late 1990's, the CIA declassified all intelligence estimates written about the Vietnam War. These estimates covered the period 1948 to 1975. The availability of declassified information made it possible to write an unclassified thesis, with sufficient detail, to examine DCI McCone's role.

Chapter Overview

Chapter two will examine DCI McCone's role in policy formulation in the Kennedy Administration from 1961-1962. There were two focus areas. The first area covers DCI McCone taking over as head of the IC and how he understood his role to be

with regards to foreign policy formulation. The second area covers DCI McCone's involvement in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the event that opened the door for him to exert more influence in the policy arena.

Chapter three examines DCI McCone's role in Vietnam policy during the last year of the Kennedy administration, 1963. Two key events highlight DCI McCone's involvement. The first was his directed rewrite of NIE 53-63 against the advice of his analysts. The second event was the role DCI McCone played in the debate on the fate of President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. While the policymakers rejected the findings of the NIE and tainted the value of IC analysis on Vietnam, DCI McCone's advocacy against a coup in South Vietnam started the process of his isolation.

Chapter four examines the role played by DCI McCone in the Lyndon Johnson Administration. The first part of the chapter covers a brief comparison of the leadership styles of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. The second part of the chapter examines DCI McCone's evolving view on the right policy to follow, which covered the years 1963 to 1965. In 1965, DCI McCone settled on a policy solution, a large scale, sustained air campaign against North Vietnam, and advocated that position until the end of his tenure as DCI.

Chapter five examines the difficulties the head of the IC has today. This chapter specifically addresses DCI George Tenet's role for operations in Afghanistan and in the 2002-2003 Iraq War Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) debate. This chapter also examines the similarities and differences on problems faced by DCI Tenet and DCI McCone in their dealings with policymakers. In the end both became isolated within the administrations they served.

Chapter six reexamines the research question and hypothesis posed for this thesis. It next focuses on the key questions asked at the beginning and summarizes their conclusions. Based off key findings, this chapter makes several recommendations for the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to follow in order to effectively work with policymakers. It also examines how IC analysis could be ignored if the DNI loses influence.

BACKGROUND ON JOHN MCCONE

Biographical Overview

John McCone was born on January 4, 1902. His life spanned the emergence of the United States as a world power. Prior to World War II, Mr. McCone worked in the steel industry. When World War II started, he shifted his focus to support the war effort. During World War II, he led his corporation, the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation,⁷ in the building of ships and other war essential items. Following the conclusion of the war, Mr. McCone entered public service. Mr. McCone served in all administrations, from Harry S. Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, in one capacity or another.

In 1947, President Truman appointed him to the commission looking at the role a future air force would have in United States national security. Mr. McCone “wrote the military recommendations in the report, which became one of the key documents”⁸ for officials in the new Defense Department seeking to increase military spending on

⁷ David Robarge, *John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence 1961-1965*, (Washington D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005), 10.

⁸ David Robarge, 13.

airpower. Following his work on the commission, Mr. McCone went to work for Secretary of Defense James Forrestal as the Special Assistant Deputy to Secretary of Defense in the newly established Department of Defense. In this role, Mr. McCone completed the first consolidated budget for the U.S. military. He was also responsible for implementing the provisions of the National Security Act of 1947 with respect to Defense Department operations.⁹

In 1949, after serving with Secretary Forrestal for several months, Mr. McCone returned to the private sector resuming his role in shipbuilding. However this stint in the private sector was short lived, as President Truman appointed him as Undersecretary of the Air Force in 1950. Although Mr. McCone served as the Undersecretary for only one year, he accomplished a great deal. During this time, Mr. McCone “familiarized [himself] with intelligence processes, bureaucracies, and personalities.”¹⁰ Alongside immersing himself in the details of national security, Mr. McCone’s leadership traits were first exposed. Mr. McCone intimidated his subordinates and he “treated high ranking officers with contempt.”¹¹ He expected the highest standards of those who worked for him and refused to accept failure.¹² In 1951, Mr. McCone returned to his shipbuilding business again but remained active in policy formulation as “U.S. policymakers continued to seek his advice.”¹³ In the midst of the Korean War (1950-1953), Mr. McCone was called again to serve the public interest. In 1952, Mr. McCone

⁹ David Robarge, 13.

¹⁰ David Robarge, 14.

¹¹ David Robarge, 14.

¹² David Robarge, 14.

¹³ David Robarge, 15.

conducted a tour of air facilities in Korea. Based on his analysis, he “recommended more rigorous training for American personnel,”¹⁴ to assist in the U.S. prosecution of the Korean War.

During the Dwight Eisenhower Administration, Mr. McCone remained active in the formulation of policy while holding no official position. Mr. McCone, a staunch Republican helped in President Eisenhower’s 1952 election campaign. President Eisenhower trusted the advice Mr. McCone offered. That trust allowed Mr. McCone to have open access to President Eisenhower. Mr. McCone was a frequent visitor to the White House holding private meetings “in the presidential residence.”¹⁵ From his extensive knowledge base of national security, “administration leaders solicited his counsel on defense reorganization, the military budget and dealings with European leaders.”¹⁶

In 1954, Mr. McCone accepted a position on the Department of State’s Public Committee on Personnel.¹⁷ On this commission he focused on the need to break down the barriers between the career diplomats and the bureaucrats in Washington.¹⁸ Highlighting his businessman skills he forced through a method that integrated the two career services. In 1958, Mr. McCone returned to formal public service with his appointment as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC).

¹⁴ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁵ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁶ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁷ David Robarge, 15.

¹⁸ David Robarge, 15.

The role he played as Chairman of the AEC foreshadowed his role as DCI. From his involvement in policy formulation, his management of a large organization in the federal government, and his dealings with peers “greatly influenced how he would direct the IC in the early 1960s.”¹⁹ He arrived at an organization that was demoralized and spent some time rebuilding its morale. He then engaged in an intense policy debate that ended up having him isolated within a presidential administration. Further, many of the challenges McCone faced as DCI he encountered as Chairman of the AEC. Much like the DCI, the Chairman of the AEC’s authority “cut across traditional departmental lines, forcing him to carefully coordinate and negotiate most of the Commission’s important decisions.”²⁰

It was during the debate on implementing a nuclear test ban that Mr. McCone openly expressed opposition to an approved policy. In opposing the stated desires of the Eisenhower Administration of concluding a nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union, Mr. McCone ended up isolating himself within the administration. As a result of the heated debate within the administration, President Eisenhower “start[ed] to distrust McCone.”²¹ President Eisenhower viewed McCone as an advocate for the nuclear industry and not the administration. Having lost the policy debate within the administration, McCone concluded his term at the AEC with no further participation in policy debates. In January 1961 John Kennedy was inaugurated as President of the United States and Mr. McCone returned again to his shipbuilding business.

¹⁹ David Robarge, 16.

²⁰ David Robarge, 19.

²¹ David Robarge, 25.

Nine months later, Mr. McCone, a lifelong Republican, returned to public life accepting the position of DCI in John F. Kennedy's Administration. After the failure of the CIA backed invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro forces in April 1961, the President wanted new leadership at the head of CIA. The choice of John McCone was a surprise. Mr. McCone did not know President Kennedy and knew very few members of his administration.²² President Kennedy wanted a proven manager to take over the CIA. John McCone fit that requirement. However, President Kennedy kept the decision from other members of his administration, fearing that if the information was known beforehand, the "liberal s.o.b.'s [in the administration]...they'd destroy you before I can get you confirmed."²³ In September 1961, Mr. McCone joined the Kennedy Administration as DCI.

McCone's View of DCI's Role in Policymaking

In the time prior to becoming DCI, John McCone was involved in policymaking, whether working in the Defense Department or as head of the AEC. Even while not holding office he still advised senior administration officials, to include President Dwight Eisenhower, on policy matters. When Mr. McCone assumed the position of DCI, he had to fundamentally alter the way he saw his role in policymaking. DCI McCone had to reconcile his past experiences as a policy advocate into a position that required neutrality.

Mr. McCone recognized the dilemma faced by a DCI. If the DCI was a policy advocate he "may unconsciously skew his production of intelligence to support policies

²² John McCone, Berkeley interview.

²³ John McCone, Berkeley interview.

which he espouses.”²⁴ Mr. McCone saw “no conflict during his tenure as DCI in his own fulfillment of both functions, believing that he could ‘shift gears’ mentally and emotionally.”²⁵ In an interview given after his time as DCI, Mr. McCone summed up his role as DCI in policy formulation with the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Describing his role in policy formulation his function was focused on

...provid[ing] intelligence and it was up to the President and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to make the decisions. Now occasionally the President would call upon me for my personal judgment on a policy decision and when I would give it I would qualify it by saying that doing so it was beyond my competence as Director of Central Intelligence. In other words, I didn’t want to get in the position where somebody might suspect that our intelligence reports were slanted because I might have a particular personal view on a policy matter.²⁶

DCI McCone presented the ideal situation for how the head of the IC should work with other policymakers in foreign policy formulation. The records, during his time as DCI, showed that DCI McCone did not follow his own advice and upon reflection after his time as DCI, Mr. McCone readily admits that “he involved himself in policy more than he should have.”²⁷ Mr. McCone provided unsolicited advice to policymakers and became directly engaged in policy debates. Even his subordinates recognized the real role DCI McCone played in policy formulation. Richard Helms, serving as his Deputy Director for Plans in CIA, commented on DCI McCone’s role. According to Mr. Helms, DCI

²⁴ Kenneth J. Campbell, “John A. McCone: An Outsider Becomes DCI,” *Studies in Intelligence* (Summer 1988): 52.

²⁵ Kenneth J. Campbell, 52.

²⁶ John A. McCone, interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, August 19, 1970, Oral History Collection, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, 28. Hereafter cited as John McCone, oral interview.

²⁷ Kenneth J. Campbell, 52.

McCone “considered his role as DCI to fall within the circle of policymaking, and took an active role in both the Kennedy and early Johnson eras.”²⁸

In order for DCI McCone to get involved in the policy debate required the analytical support from the CIA and the Office of National Estimate (ONE). While these elements provided the analysis for U.S. policy towards Vietnam, at times, DCI McCone relied on his own analysis of events to back up his advocacy. William Colby, the CIA lead for Vietnam, observed Mr. McCone’s use of his own analysis.

I don’t think it was the analyst; it was John McCone largely. I mean, McCone had the courage of his convictions. He’d say things that were pretty far out, but he would say them as recommendations. His estimates would be well-founded. He would use the analysts very well for their estimates, but he’d make his judgments about what we ought to do. That was his business, not [the analysts].²⁹

The combination of Mr. McCone’s involvement with policy formulation as an advocate and relying on his own estimates of the situation was detrimental not only to the IC but also to his ability to be an influential figure within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

²⁸ Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 306.

²⁹ William Colby, second interview conducted by Ted Gittinger, March 1, 1982, Oral History Collection, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, 11.

CHAPTER 2

JOINING THE POLICY DEBATE, 1961 - 1962

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on two events that define DCI McCone's role in asserting his authority over the IC and his initial foray as a policy advocate that would come to dominate his tenure as DCI. The first is the steps DCI McCone needed to take to assert his authority over the IC. Since the inception of the IC in 1947, DCI McCone was the first individual with little or no experience with intelligence-related matters. His nomination by President John Kennedy in 1961, replacing Allen Dulles,³⁰ was not well received within the administration or IC. The years 1961 through 1962, DCI McCone worked to assert his control over the IC.

The second area this chapter examines is the role DCI McCone played during the Cuban Missile Crisis. During the summer and fall of 1962, DCI McCone asserted himself within the foreign policy establishment. DCI McCone participated in all the debates within the Kennedy Administration, advocating a hard line against the Soviets. At the conclusion of the crisis, DCI McCone found his voice in the policy debate but also exposed himself to the challenges of being a policy advocate.

³⁰ Allen Dulles served as DCI from 1953-1961. Dulles was one of the few Eisenhower appointments to carry over into the Kennedy Administration.

TAKING CHARGE OF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Nomination and Resistance

John McCone was not John Kennedy's first choice for Director of Central Intelligence, but he needed John McCone. Reeling from the fallout from the Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961, President Kennedy looked to change national intelligence leadership. At the time, President Kennedy decided to remove long-time DCI Allen Dulles and looked for someone who could better manage the IC. Before settling on John McCone, President Kennedy offered the position of DCI to several influential members of the foreign policy establishment, like Clark Clifford, before being persuaded by his brother, Robert Kennedy, to offer the job to John McCone.³¹ Robert Kennedy wanted "movers and doers and activists, men who could cut through the...bureaucracy."³² John McCone fit that requirement.

DCI McCone's appointment offered President Kennedy several positive outcomes. First, John McCone was a proven administrator, and in the view of President Kennedy, the CIA needed an administrator to repair and better manage the Agency.³³ Second, John McCone's appointment elevated the position of DCI above partisan politics. In appointing a conservative Republican in a liberal Democratic administration, DCI McCone shielded President Kennedy from criticism from the political right.³⁴

³¹ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 152. Hereafter cited as David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*.

³² David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 153.

³³ Kenneth J. Campbell, 50.

³⁴ Kenneth J. Campbell, 50.

While DCI McCone solved some of President Kennedy's immediate problems, his nomination was not well received by members within the Kennedy Administration. DCI McCone was appointed on September 27, 1961, but the furor of his nomination began almost immediately. On September 28, 1961, McGeorge Bundy, President Kennedy's National Security Advisor, wrote about the problems DCI McCone's nomination caused.

The McCone appointment is the big news here. I, for one, underestimated the strength of the opposition in the second and third levels of CIA and State. It appears that most of the people involved in intelligence estimates on atomic energy matters thought McCone was highly prejudiced. He also had a reputation, in these circles, as an 'operator' whose loyalty to Administration policy was doubtful. So there is a significant problem in working out a pattern of strong cooperation and support for him.³⁵

Another factor generating opposition to DCI McCone's nomination was his role in policymaking. There was a concern that DCI McCone might fail to understand his new role of neutrality. In all his past government positions, DCI McCone was a policy advocate. To his critics, the belief was that the CIA needed "a professional manager and technician rather [than] a policy-oriented advocate."³⁶ This concern was shared by senior leaders in the CIA, wondering whether John McCone would "have the objectivity to maintain relatively unbiased national intelligence estimates."³⁷

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "91. Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Kennedy," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyj/xxv/6008.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008). Subsequent citation of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* will be shortened to *FRUS* with appropriate volume annotated.

³⁶ David Robarge, 31.

³⁷ Kenneth J. Campbell, 50.

Overcoming Resistance

During the first few months as DCI, John McCone had two pressing challenges to overcome. The first was a combination of restoring the morale of the CIA as well as building trust and confidence of his subordinates in his leadership. The second challenge was expanding the role and responsibility of the DCI, specifically ensuring that the DCI was the principal intelligence officer for the President. In both instances, Mr. McCone was largely successful.

Initial apprehension within CIA to McCone becoming DCI was quickly dissipated by his administrative abilities and his refocusing of CIA's priorities. Prior to McCone assuming the position of DCI, the CIA primarily focused on clandestine operations. DCI McCone shifted that priority away from clandestine operations and towards the analytical operations of the Agency. His focus on the analysis aspect of the Agency was made with the intent of it becoming the "best possible so it would have the maximum influence on policymakers."³⁸

His subordinates were won over by his tough leadership style. Richard Helms, reflecting on DCI McCone's directorship stated that "[DCI] McCone turned out to have been exactly the right man to replace Allen Dulles."³⁹ He further elaborated on the impact DCI McCone had on the CIA.

McCone was another example of a man who might have stepped straight from central casting in Hollywood. His white hair, ruddy cheek, brisk gait, impeccable dark suits, rimless glasses, aloof manner, and unmistakable self-confidence were the profile of a modern executive. He had an extraordinary memory and the ability to pick the essence from any document no matter how long or

³⁸ David Robarge, 37.

³⁹ Richard Helms, 191.

complex, and to reduce it to a few sentences....For McCone, deadlines were deadlines, and no matter if sometimes unrealistic, were to be met to the minute. He also knew that all manner of devils dwelt in the details.⁴⁰

Winning the support of his subordinates was only the first half of the task. He also needed to expand his own authority as DCI over the whole of the Intelligence Community.

Expanding His Authority

As leader of the IC, the position of the DCI is codified in law, the National Security Act of 1947. While directly serving as head of the CIA, DCI McCone exercised his control over the rest of the IC through his chairmanship of the United States Intelligence Board (USIB). National Security Council Intelligence Directive (NSCID) 1, released on January 18, 1961, defined the role of the USIB.

...to maintain the relationship necessary for the fully coordinated intelligence community, and to provide for a more effective integration of and guidance to the national intelligence effort...⁴¹

When DCI McCone took over the USIB it was comprised of the following organizations: CIA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Security Agency (NSA), the service departments of the Department of Defense (Army, Navy and Air Force), and the Joint Staff.

NSCID 1 addressed the responsibilities of the DCI. In his role as Chairman of the USIB, DCI McCone was responsible to “coordinate the foreign intelligence activities of

⁴⁰ Richard Helms, 195.

⁴¹ Michael Warner, ed., *Central Intelligence: Origin and Evolution*, (Washington D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001), 61.

the United States in accordance with existing law and applicable National Security Council directives.”⁴² Further DCI McCone also played a central role in the dissemination of NIEs. NSCID 1 elaborated on the requirements.

The Director of Central Intelligence shall disseminate national intelligence to the President, members of the National Security Council as appropriate, members of the U.S. Intelligence Board and, subject to existing statutes, to such other components of the government as the National Security Council may from time to time designate or the U.S. Intelligence Board may recommend.⁴³

Along with his statutory authorities, DCI McCone sought out a personal endorsement of his position from President Kennedy. DCI McCone “did not want to be merely the president’s special assistant for intelligence or have anyone else in the administration assuming the role of national intelligence officer,”⁴⁴ he wanted to be the lead intelligence person for the President and the government.

Solidifying His Authority

DCI McCone took a dual-track approach to solidifying his authority over the IC. First, he reorganized the USIB. Second, he sought out President Kennedy’s endorsement of his new stature. DCI McCone focused on reforming the structure of the USIB to enhance his position over the IC. As Chairman of the USIB, DCI McCone had the “most important bureaucratic lever...for exerting force on these agencies.”⁴⁵ The first step he took was to remove himself as the voice of the CIA on the USIB. The Deputy Director

⁴² Michael Warner, ed., 61.

⁴³ Michael Warner, ed., 65.

⁴⁴ David Robarge, 30.

⁴⁵ David Robarge, 64.

of Central Intelligence sat on the USIB as the CIA representative. By removing himself as the Agency's advocate, DCI McCone became the President's advocate.⁴⁶

He further streamlined the USIB by removing the Joint Staff and the individual military services. In their place, DCI McCone, with concurrence from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, placed the newly established Defense Intelligence Agency as the Department of Defense representative. In explaining his decision to the president, McCone stated that "in limiting the regular membership of the United States Intelligence Board....it would be our view that substantive dissents...should continue to be reflected in estimates and other findings and decisions of the United States Intelligence Board."⁴⁷

After completing the reforms of the USIB in December 1961, DCI McCone sought President Kennedy's endorsement. In a letter to DCI McCone, President Kennedy gave his personal endorsements to the changes made. He further endorsed DCI McCone's position as head of the IC.

In carrying out your newly assigned duties as Director of Central Intelligence it is my wish that you serve as the Government's principal foreign intelligence officer, and as such that you undertake, as an integral part of your responsibility, the coordination and effective guidance of the total United States foreign intelligence effort.⁴⁸

Along with the endorsement, the level of access granted by President Kennedy further enhanced DCI McCone's position. DCI McCone was allocated almost weekly

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "96. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Kennedy," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "96. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Kennedy," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "99. Memorandum From President Kennedy to Director of Central Intelligence McCone," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 3, 2008).

private meetings with the President to discuss a wide range of intelligence matters. Increasing his own access enhanced the IC as well. Through his closeness with the President, CIA analysis was considered by those in the Agency to be worthwhile and readily accepted by senior policymakers within the administration.⁴⁹ By the end of 1962, McCone had completed the reorganization he deemed necessary to position himself as leader of the IC. This new leadership role allowed him a free hand to “deal with policymakers...”⁵⁰ DCI McCone’s self-confidence made him “a strong and assertive figure among policymakers.”⁵¹

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS – ENTERING THE POLICY DEBATE

Overview of Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over the Soviets installing offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba. While the actual event, termed the Cuban Missile Crisis, occurred during the last two weeks of October 1962, a series of events in the summer of 1962 led to the confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR. During the summer months of 1962, the Soviets shipped and installed offensive missiles in Cuba. The Soviets emplaced Surface-to-Air (SA)-2 missiles around sites in western Cuba to protect the installation of Surface-to-Surface (SS)-4 Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and SS-5 Intermediate-Range

⁴⁹ David Robarge, 38.

⁵⁰ David Robarge, 58.

⁵¹ William M. Leary, ed., *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, (University of Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 77.

Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). The U.S. tracked Soviet activities through aerial surveillance of Cuba. In August 1963, a debate ensued in Washington D.C. about Soviet intentions. On one side was DCI McCone who saw the Soviet buildup as offensive in nature. On the other side was the IC and policymakers within the Kennedy Administration who assessed Soviet intentions as defensive only. The Cuban Missile Crisis represented an important turning point in how DCI McCone saw his role in policymaking. From the crisis, DCI McCone “solidified his place in the Kennedy Administration as an active participant in the policy process.”⁵²

Prelude to October

Prior to the dramatic events of October 1962, DCI McCone was alone in his assessment of Soviet intentions in Cuba. Meanwhile, the general consensus within the Kennedy Administration and the IC was that the Soviet support to Cuba was defensive in nature only. DCI McCone, using his own analysis, foresaw the buildup of Soviet activities in Cuba in the summer of 1962 as offensive, not defensive, in nature. The basis for his contentions stemmed from his fervent anti-communist attitudes. Up until final confirmation of Soviet activities on Cuba in mid October, DCI McCone remained at odds with his own senior analysts in the IC.

The basis for this difference stemmed from DCI McCone’s “businessman’s intuition...to evaluate possibilities.”⁵³ While DCI McCone relied on intuition, his analysts relied on available facts to make an assessment. DCI McCone and his analysts saw the same information and came to different conclusions on Soviet activities. At the

⁵² William M. Leary, ed., 77.

⁵³ David Robarge, 104.

center of this dispute was the placement of Soviet SA-2 missile sites on Cuba. During the 1960's, the SA-2 was the Soviets "main anti-aircraft weapon."⁵⁴ The SA-2 could destroy "targets at an altitude of 27 kilometers and a range of 35 kilometers."⁵⁵ SA-2's were used to protect key installations within the USSR and Eastern Europe. It was a Soviet SA-2 missile that shot down the Gary Powers's U2 in 1960. The emplacement of SA-2's on Cuba allowed the Soviets to install the SS-4's and SS-5's under an effective anti-aircraft shield from potential U.S. attacks.

DCI McCone, alone, saw this emplacement of the SA-2's as a precursor to the establishment of MRBM and IRBM sites on Cuba. Russell J. Smith, the head of the Office of Current Intelligence within CIA, laid out the analysts' view on the placement of the SA-2's.

Throughout the 1950's we watched them splash SA-2's all over the Soviet Union, often in greater numbers and in places for which U.S. military men could find no reasonable justification. The Soviet Union also bestowed SA-2's lavishly on their Eastern European satellite states. So, to us it seemed neither particularly surprising nor significant that SA-2s were going to Cuba by the boatload.⁵⁶

This logical deduction was not supported by DCI McCone's analysis.

To Director John McCone, this was not persuasive. He was confident that investing so many SA-2s in Cuba meant that the Soviets intended to deploy something they wished to protect: offensive missiles to threaten the United States.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Missilethreat.com, "S-75 (SA-2 Guideline)," A Project of the Claremont Institute, http://www.missilethreat.com/missiledefensesystems/id.47/system_detail.asp (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁵⁵ Missilethreat.com, "S-75 (SA-2 Guideline)," A Project of the Claremont Institute, http://www.missilethreat.com/missiledefensesystems/id.47/system_detail.asp (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁵⁶ Russell J. Smith, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1992): 180.

⁵⁷ Russell J. Smith, 180.

On September 19, 1962, the Office of National Estimates released Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 85-3-62, titled “The Military Buildup in Cuba,” which backed the logic presented by Mr. Smith on Soviet activities on Cuba. The conclusion of the SNIE emphasized the importance of the defensive nature of the buildup. In the SNIE’s judgment, the Soviets were merely protecting their client state and not seeking a confrontation with the U.S. The SNIE further concluded that installation of offensive weapons “might provoke US military intervention,”⁵⁸ thus defeating the intent of the Soviets to protect Cuba.

Adding to DCI McCone’s problems, most senior members of the Kennedy Administration shared the same opinion of the IC on Soviet activities. Up until mid October 1962, DCI McCone’s assessment was dismissed as “a worst case scenario.”⁵⁹ For DCI McCone, the problem was that all evidence, up to that point, was unclear as to Soviet intentions. In discussing the Cuban Missile Crisis, Richard Helms succinctly puts it, “McCone’s deductive logic was one thing, proof positive was another.”⁶⁰

The Crisis in October

Proof positive occurred on 15 October 1962 when a U.S. U2 flight identified the installation of SS-4 and SS-5 sites on Cuba.⁶¹ During the 1960’s, the SS-4 was a single warhead nuclear missile that “constituted the bulk of the Soviet offensive missile threat to

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. X Cuba, 1961-1962*, “433. Special National Intelligence Estimate,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusX/421_443.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁵⁹ David Robarge, 106.

⁶⁰ Richard Helms, 212.

⁶¹ Richard Helms, 208.

Western Europe.”⁶² The maximum range of the SS-4 was 2,000 kilometers. From hardened sites built in western Cuba, a SS-4 could reach Washington D.C. In hardened positions the reaction time for launch was “five to fifteen minutes.”⁶³ The SS-5 was similar in design to the SS-4; however, with extra fuel capacity the SS-5 range was extended to 4,500 kilometers.⁶⁴ From Cuba, a SS-5 could reach San Francisco, California. The reaction time for the SS-5 was the same as the SS-4.⁶⁵

From 15 October until 31 October, the missile crisis consumed the Kennedy Administration. Within the administration the debate raged on how to effectively deal with the Soviet threat. DCI McCone was actively involved in all these debates. In the first week of the crisis, DCI McCone participated in over 30 meetings to debate the proper course of action against Cuba and the Soviet Union.⁶⁶

On October 17, 1962, DCI McCone laid out in a memorandum his views and recommended options the administration should follow. He used this memorandum as a basis for discussion with other policymakers in a meeting held on that same day. DCI McCone reminded all that he alone correctly assessed Soviet intentions.⁶⁷ Next he went into what he perceived the consequences were of U.S. actions. In his judgment a harsh

⁶² Globalsecurity.org, “R-12 / SS-4 SANDAL,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-12.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶³ Globalsecurity.org, “R-12 / SS-4 SANDAL,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-12.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶⁴ Globalsecurity.org, “R-14 / SS-5 SKEAN,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-14-specs.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶⁵ Globalsecurity.org, “R-14 / SS-5 SKEAN,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-14-specs.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

⁶⁶ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, (Washington D.C.: History Staff, Central Intelligence Agency, 1992), 158-159.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, “26. Memorandum for Discussion,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

response by the U.S. could result in the death of Soviet personnel, further increasing tensions between the two superpowers. DCI McCone recommended the U.S. give Soviets a limited amount of time, no more than 24 hours, to dismantle their operations in Cuba. If they refused, DCI McCone recommended “we should make a massive surprise strike at air fields, MRMB sites and SAM sites concurrently.”⁶⁸

As DCI McCone pressured policymakers to take a hard line against the Soviets, he also worked to get the USIB in line with his thinking. Keeping the USIB informed on deliberations within the White House, DCI McCone laid out the considered courses of actions along with his analysis of each.

A discussion among the principals on October 18th indicated a probable decision, if any action is taken against Cuba, to initiate a limited blockade designed to prevent the importation into Cuba of additional arms....More extreme steps such as limited air strikes, comprehensive air strikes, or military invasion would be withheld awaiting developments....The arguments in favor of the blockade was principally that it initiated a positive action which could be intensified at our will or could be relaxed depending upon evolving circumstances....The obvious disadvantages are the protracted nature of the operation, the difficulties of sustaining our position in world opinion...and finally, the action does not reverse the present trend of building an offensive capability within Cuba....The above course of action is by no means unanimous....I would like guidance from the USIB members for my further discussions...⁶⁹

On October 19, 1962, the USIB released Special National Intelligence estimate 11-18-62.

Its conclusions tracked with the thinking of DCI McCone.

US acceptance of the strategic missile buildup would provide strong encouragement to Communists, pro-communists, and the more anti-American sectors of opinion in Latin

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, “26. Memorandum for Discussion,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁶⁹ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 193-194.

America and elsewhere. Conversely, anti-Communist and those who relate their own interests to those of the US would be strongly discouraged. It seems clear that, especially over the long run, there would be a loss of confidence in US power and determination and a serious decline of US influence generally....There is no reason to believe that a blockade of itself would bring down the Castro regime. The Soviets would almost certainly exert strong pressure elsewhere to end the blockade.⁷⁰

As the Cuban Missile Crisis played itself out over the two weeks, DCI McCone's role evolved. Initially he confined himself with presenting current intelligence to President Kennedy's national security team. As the crisis progressed, DCI McCone freely interjected his views into the policy debate. To better manage the crisis, President Kennedy created the Executive Committee (EXCOM), a smaller group from the National Security Council. DCI McCone was a member of the EXCOM. Within the EXCOM, the members formed into three groups: 'Hawks', who advocated "early and strong use of military force,"⁷¹ 'Doves' advocating reaching "a diplomatic settlement,"⁷² and 'Owls' who maneuvered between the positions of the Hawks and Doves.⁷³ DCI McCone belonged to the Hawk camp.

As these groups formed, the debates centered on four possible courses of actions: "[1] airstrikes, [2] a blockade cast as an ultimatum to be followed by air attacks, [3] a blockade as a delaying tactic to gauge Soviet intentions, and [4] a blockade as an opening

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, "32. Special National Intelligence Estimate," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁷¹ David Robarge, 114.

⁷² David Robarge, 114.

⁷³ David Robarge, 114.

to negotiations...”⁷⁴ From DCI McCone’s point of view, he favored a blockade that led to airstrikes. In a meeting of the NSC on October 20, 1962, DCI McCone gave his opinion on the courses of actions debated to President Kennedy.

McCone stated his opposition to an airstrike, but admitted that in his view a blockade was not enough. He argued that we should institute the blockade and tell the Russians that if the missiles were not dismantled within seventy-two hours, the United States would destroy the missiles by air attacks.⁷⁵

This opinion tracked his earlier position on October 17, 1962.

On October 20, 1962, the Kennedy Administration settled on a quarantine of Cuba in response to Soviet actions. While DCI McCone questioned the effectiveness of a quarantine, he did moderate his views to go along with President Kennedy’s decision. McCone’s pushing for stronger action was a similar approach he took towards Vietnam policy; gradual escalation without a forceful backup was no solution.

Alongside serving an intelligence role for President Kennedy, DCI McCone also served as his go between to senior leaders in the Republican Party, specifically former President Eisenhower. In this role, DCI McCone’s mission was to sell the administration’s policy. During the crisis, DCI McCone held two private meetings with Eisenhower to layout the position of the Kennedy Administration and also to provide his own view on the situation.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ David Robarge, 115.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, “34. Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/26_50.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁷⁶ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 157-158.

On October 17, 1963, DCI McCone met with Eisenhower. In a memorandum he wrote to capture the topics discussed, DCI McCone implied that he and President Eisenhower were in agreement as to the proper course of action.

In discuss[ing] the blockades, [Eisenhower] mentioned the difficulty of [a] type of operation we would take if and when a Soviet ship, laden with military hardware and personnel, is stopped on the high seas. The question he raised, as do I, is 'What would we do with the ship then?'I told General Eisenhower that I did not expect an answer but both the President and I wished him to be fully informed and that I would like to consult with him from time to time.⁷⁷

DCI McCone met again with Eisenhower on October 21, 1963. During this meeting, DCI McCone and Eisenhower discussed at length military options available to the U.S. During the meeting, Eisenhower sided with DCI McCone's arguments against a surprise attack by the U.S.⁷⁸ Eisenhower agreed that the potential for increased tensions was too great. Through his efforts, Eisenhower backed the actions of President Kennedy towards the Soviets and Cuba. By playing this role, DCI McCone managed to turn a potential partisan adversary of the President into a supporter.

On October 24, 1962, the Soviet Union ceased their shipment of missiles to Cuba. This began the next stage in the debate how to defuse the situation. The new debate centered on agreeing to the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba in exchange for the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. As the threat of a military option subsided, the question debated within the administration was how far to compromise with the Soviets. DCI McCone argued during this period that the U.S. had the upper hand and should demand the Soviets back down without giving them anything in return. Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), argued for the removal of U.S. missiles

⁷⁷ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 167-168.

⁷⁸ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 243-244.

from Turkey. He also argued that the U.S. should dismantle the naval base at Guantanamo, Cuba and allow UN inspectors to verify the dismantling of the missile sites. DCI McCone strongly and vehemently opposed these suggestions.

[DCI] McCone disagreed with Ambassador Stevenson's linking of Soviet missiles in Cuba to U.S. missiles in Turkey. He said the Soviet weapons in Cuba were pointed at our heart and put us under great handicap in continuing to carry out our commitments to the free world.⁷⁹

DCI McCone worried that the "administration might be compromising too much."⁸⁰ He further argued that only U.S. inspectors verify the dismantling of the missile sites in Cuba.

DCI McCone did make some contradictory statements as to the value of the missiles based in Turkey. In an oral interview given several years after the events of October 1962, DCI McCone downplayed the importance of the missiles in Turkey. As DCI McCone related "nobody ever thought the missiles in Turkey were worth anything anyways....They never should have been put there in the first place. I opposed them. I wanted them taken out a couple of years before."⁸¹ However at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone was adamant in his opposition to a missile swap to the point that he was excluded from further EXCOM meetings.⁸²

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, "79. Summary Record of the Sixth Meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusXI/76_100.html (accessed June 3, 2008).

⁸⁰ David Robarge, 118.

⁸¹ John McCone, oral interview, 13.

⁸² David Robarge, 123.

Crisis Fallout

By the end of October, the Cuban Missile Crisis had subsided, and DCI McCone faced the repercussion of some of his actions. DCI McCone having correctly deduced Soviet intentions did not fail to remind everyone within the National Security apparatus that he was correct. In using an “I told you so attitude,” he alienated several key members of the Kennedy Administration that also played key roles in the Johnson Administration, individuals like McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara. Bundy commented about McCone’s performance. Bundy stated that he was tired of hearing how right DCI McCone was in predicting the Soviets’ intentions that he “never want[ed] to hear it again.”⁸³ Secretary McNamara held a similar view towards McCone’s performance. Secretary McNamara “privately criticized McCone for not predicting the crisis hard enough.”⁸⁴ From Secretary McNamara’s perspective, McCone’s correctness did not hide the fact that the CIA failed to accurately predict the Soviet threat.⁸⁵

Along with the criticism directed towards McCone’s activities, it was also directed against the CIA and its poor analytical performance. The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) reviewed the activities of the IC and presented their report to President Kennedy on February 4, 1963. The report concentrated on the analysis provide by the IC. Commenting on SNIE 85-3-62, the PFIAB report concluded that the “President and [policymakers] were ill served by the [SNIE].”⁸⁶ The PFIAB

⁸³ David Robarge, 129.

⁸⁴ David Robarge, 129.

⁸⁵ David Robarge, 129.

⁸⁶ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 366.

report attacked every key finding made by the IC in the SNIE. The report served as an indictment against the analytical performance of the IC.

We believe that the near-total intelligence surprise experienced by the United States with respect to the introduction and deployment of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba resulted in large part from a malfunction of the analytic process by which intelligence indicators are assessed and reported. This malfunction diminished the effectiveness of [policymakers], national intelligence estimators, and civilian and military officers having command responsibilities.⁸⁷

The report ignored DCI McCone's performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

On February 28, 1963, DCI McCone sent a memorandum to President Kennedy addressing the points of the PFIAB's report. In his response, he attempted to explain the failures of the IC's analysis. According to DCI McCone, analysts "were so convinced that the Soviets would not accept the inevitable confrontation resulting from the placements of offensive missiles in Cuba, [analysts] were inclined to dismiss such evidence as there was to the contrary."⁸⁸ DCI McCone faulted the analysts' ability to understand the intent of the adversary. While he faulted the failure of his analysts, DCI McCone did not fail to remind President that his "own views differed from those of the community."⁸⁹ The PFIAB report, combined with DCI McCone's assessment, only served to undermine the IC's analysis in the eyes of policymakers. The problems exposed by the IC's analysis would have a detrimental effect in policymakers accepting IC analysis on Vietnam.

⁸⁷ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 367.

⁸⁸ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 374.

⁸⁹ Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., 374.

In the end DCI McCone's performance strained his relations with President Kennedy, as it put into question DCI McCone's "political loyalties."⁹⁰ Congressional critics of the President "praised McCone for being the only administration figure to predict what Moscow would do in Cuba."⁹¹ Congressional Republicans "used [McCone's] post crisis testimony before a Senate committee to support assertions that the administration had blundered."⁹² These events strained his relations with President Kennedy. Prior to the crisis, DCI McCone enjoyed a close relation with President Kennedy. After the crisis that relationship grew more distant and more businesslike.⁹³ DCI McCone's lack of access furthered his isolation within the administration, as the administration debated the proper course to follow in South Vietnam.

⁹⁰ David Robarge, 129.

⁹¹ David Robarge, 134.

⁹² David Robarge, 129.

⁹³ David Robarge, 136.

CHAPTER 3

DCI MCCONE AND VIETNAM POLICY IN THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION, 1963

INTRODUCTION

During the first two years of the Kennedy Administration (1961-1962), DCI McCone focused on establishing his position within the IC. In 1963, as President Kennedy shifted his focus to South Vietnam so too did DCI McCone. This chapter examines DCI McCone's role during the Vietnam debates of 1963. Two events occurred during 1963 that highlighted his role. The first was DCI McCone's personal intervention in changing the tone of a National Intelligence Estimate. The second event was the debate on the fate of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Before discussing these two events it is important to give a brief overview of U.S. Vietnam policy up to 1963.

OVERVIEW OF U.S. VIETNAM POLICY

Policy under the Eisenhower Administration

From 1954 onwards, the United States was involved in the conflict in Southeast Asia. The U.S.'s effort concentrated on the survival of the South Vietnamese regime. The independence of Vietnam was established at the end of the Vietnamese war against

France in 1954. At the time, Vietnam was divided into two parts. North Vietnam was placed under communist rule, headed by Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam became a democratic state under the rule of President Diem. When South Vietnam became independent, the United States provided aid and support.

Initial support from the United States came in the form of economic and military assistance. During the Eisenhower Administration, a small number of U.S. military personnel were sent to train the new South Vietnamese military. The size of the U.S. contingent remained below 1,000 troops throughout the Eisenhower Administration. From its establishment, South Vietnam was fighting a communist led insurgency. The main insurgent group was the Viet Cong (VC), which received military and financial support from the government of North Vietnam. Throughout the remainder of the Eisenhower Administration, South Vietnam, with limited U.S. support, fought the VC to a stalemate but was never able to defeat them. Further adding to the problems in South Vietnam was the increased corruption in the Diem regime. President Diem, a Catholic, conducted a heavy repressive campaign against the majority Buddhist population of South Vietnam. In South Vietnam, 70% of the population was Buddhist.⁹⁴

Under President Diem power resided in the minority Catholic population. Between the two groups there was mutual animosity, with the majority Buddhist population considering the Catholic population as “undesirable.”⁹⁵ With power residing

⁹⁴ Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 284.

⁹⁵ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: American and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2008), 119. Hereafter cited as David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*.

in the Catholic minority “favoritism and abuses inevitably resulted.”⁹⁶ In some provinces of South Vietnam where the population was completely Buddhist, leaders of the province were all completely Catholic.⁹⁷ As President Diem was the main supporter of the Catholic minority population, they fervently supported President Diem. Catholics filled the ranks of President Diem’s internal security forces that were used against the Buddhists.⁹⁸ These actions of the Diem regime only served to alienate the local Buddhist populace from supporting the government.

Policy under the Kennedy Administration

When John Kennedy came into office he directed a fundamental review of U.S. Vietnam policy. Throughout 1961, the Kennedy Administration tried to determine a correct course of action to follow in Vietnam. Senior policymakers recognized that current U.S. policies on Vietnam were not working, as the VC was still unbeaten and the Diem regime was losing popular support.

The Kennedy Administration debated three possible courses of actions. The first option, Kennedy could commit large numbers of U.S. ground forces and begin large scale conventional operations against the VC.⁹⁹ A second option was an increase in economic and military aid to South Vietnam with the intent of using the aid to coax Diem into reforming his regime.¹⁰⁰ A third option was that the U.S. would commit to a minimal

⁹⁶ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 119.

⁹⁷ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 119.

⁹⁸ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 119.

⁹⁹ David Robarge, 167.

¹⁰⁰ David Robarge, 167.

presence in South Vietnam and provide all the necessary aid to Diem without strings.¹⁰¹

In November 1961, President Kennedy approved course of action three as U.S. policy.¹⁰²

However, for the remainder of Kennedy's term the U.S. military's role greatly expanded, transforming "the 'limited-risk gamble' of the Eisenhower Administration into a 'broad commitment' to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam."¹⁰³

THE REWRITE OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE 53-63

Introduction

A NIE is the consensus opinion of the entire IC. During the 1960's, NIE's were written by the CIA's Office of National Estimates (ONE). It was the responsibility of the ONE to draft a NIE, and then present it to the rest of the IC for review. After the review process, the completed draft was presented to the USIB for final approval and dissemination. Under DCI McCone, the ONE produced "about 50 national intelligence estimates a year."¹⁰⁴ In February 1963, DCI McCone directed the ONE to rewrite National Intelligence Estimate 53-63, *Prospects in South Vietnam*.

The Reason for DCI McCone's Interference

Why did DCI McCone force an unnecessary change to NIE 53-63 in February 1963? The main reason stems from the problems he faced within the administration after

¹⁰¹ David Robarge, 167.

¹⁰² David Robarge, 167.

¹⁰³ Neil Sheehan, et al. *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times*, (New York: Bantam Books, inc, 1971), 79.

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth J. Campbell, 56.

the Cuban Missile Crisis. He also struggled to reconcile his own negative views on the situation in Vietnam with the optimistic views of policymakers. In the end, DCI McCone chose to align with the policymakers rather than with his analysts.

In 1962, DCI McCone, along with Secretary of Defense McNamara, visited Vietnam. While Secretary McNamara “returned with glowing accounts of improvements in South Vietnam,”¹⁰⁵ DCI McCone held a more negative view on prospects in Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ DCI McCone’s hardcore anti-communist views did not coincide with the approach Kennedy chose to take in Vietnam.

[DCI] McCone disagreed with many of the diplomatic and military tactics the administration was using in Vietnam and questioned whether the United States could achieve its objectives. He became frustrated over the discrepancy between President Kennedy’s rhetoric and US actions....Impatience, a search for clarity, and a penchant for efficiency characterized McCone’s approach to the Vietnam question.¹⁰⁷

While carrying this attitude about U.S. efforts in Vietnam, DCI McCone surprised CIA analysts with his demand that NIE 53-63 be rewritten to reflect a more positive outlook on Vietnam.¹⁰⁸

In February 1963, the draft of NIE 53-63 was presented to the USIB, DCI McCone’s “voice in the administration had diminished after the Cuban missile crisis and...his persistent doubts about Vietnam further strained his relations with

¹⁰⁵ John Prados, *Lost Crusader The Secret Wars of CIA Director William Colby*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 106.

¹⁰⁶ Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962-1968*, (Pittsburgh: Government Printing Office, 1998), 6.

¹⁰⁷ David Robarge, 171.

¹⁰⁸ Harold P. Ford, 12.

policymakers.”¹⁰⁹ In February 1963, DCI McCone was contending with the findings from the PFIAB on the IC’s performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Still dealing with the fallout from the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone was in no mood to present a NIE that was at odds with the prevailing view of senior members of the Kennedy Administration.¹¹⁰ In the draft of NIE 53-63, the analysts questioned the fighting capabilities of the South Vietnamese military and its leadership, which if taken to its logical conclusion questioned the capabilities of the U.S. to effectively train this force.¹¹¹ Such an assertion put DCI McCone into conflict with the views of Secretary McNamara. Believing he needed to repair his relations with policymakers, DCI McCone undermined his own analysts.

NIE Rewrite

Since 1948, the CIA produced over 70 intelligence estimates, summaries or memorandums that dealt specifically with Southeast Asia,¹¹² without any interference from the DCI or policymakers. CIA analysts consistently maintained a pessimistic view of the situation in Vietnam.¹¹³

The initial draft of NIE 53-63, written in September 1962, followed the same pessimistic line as previous intelligence products on Vietnam. The draft took into

¹⁰⁹ David Robarge, 172.

¹¹⁰ David Robarge, 177.

¹¹¹ David Robarge, 177.

¹¹² David F. Gordon, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Pittsburgh: Government Printing Office, 2005), 651-655.

¹¹³ Harold P. Ford, 12.

account the current situation in Vietnam and attempted to present a balanced view on what was occurring.

The draft had some good analysis, new data and so on...it implied a possibility for swifter progress under a post-Diem Vietnamese government. There was no claim that Diem had to go. There was solid buttressing for the view that the Vietnam war had stalled. The January 1963 battle at An Bac where Viet Cong soldiers stood their ground and defeated South Vietnamese troops backed up by helicopters and armored personnel carriers, added further to the substance.¹¹⁴

The draft NIE was presented to the USIB in February 1963, and instead of embracing the assessment of his analysts, DCI McCone “savaged the NIE.”¹¹⁵ From DCI McCone’s viewpoint, the NIE never took into account the views of people who understood the situation in Vietnam.¹¹⁶

After rejecting the draft, DCI McCone demanded a complete rewrite to reflect the views of policymakers within the government. From his perspective, policymakers and not his analysts knew the situation in Vietnam the best.¹¹⁷

According to Director McCone, the people who knew best were [William] Colby; his chief of station, John Richardson; the Army’s Chief of Staff [General Earl Wheeler] and its South Vietnam commander [General Paul Harkins], [U.S.] Ambassador Fredrick Notling, the naval commander in the Pacific [Admiral Harry D. Felt], [Department of] State’s Roger Hilsman and the NSC staffer for Southeast Asia, Michael Forrestal.¹¹⁸

Since nearly all senior policymakers held an optimistic view on Vietnam, the draft of the NIE was not well received. Senior U.S. military personnel undercut the assertion

¹¹⁴ John Prados, 106.

¹¹⁵ John Prados, 106.

¹¹⁶ Harold P. Ford, 12.

¹¹⁷ Harold P. Ford, 12.

¹¹⁸ John Prados, 106.

that the South Vietnamese military was weak and ill served by its leadership. The worst comments came from the U.S. naval commander for the Pacific, Admiral Felt. He compared the document to North Vietnamese propaganda.¹¹⁹ Unable to persuade policymakers on their analysis, CIA analysts succumbed to the pressure and rewrote NIE 53-63. The resulting change in the document reflected the views held by senior policymakers. Released on April 17, 1963 NIE 53-63, made the following key judgment

We believe that Communist progress has been blunted and that the situation is improving. Strengthened South Vietnamese capabilities and effectiveness, and particularly US involvement, are causing the Viet Cong increased difficulty, although there are as yet no persuasive indications that the Communist have been grievously hurt.¹²⁰

The importance of the NIE's findings was embraced by senior policymakers. NIE 53-63 confirmed the optimistic reporting coming from U.S. officials in Vietnam. DCI McCone used his position to force a change to an NIE against the wishes of his analysts. While DCI McCone thought he had aligned the IC with the assessment of policymakers. In reality, he undermined the position of the IC.

NIE Fallout

Within one month of NIE 53-63's release, a major uprising by the majority Buddhist population in South Vietnam took place against the Diem regime. The size of anti-government riots and increased activities by Viet Cong forces "invalidated [NIE 53-63'] key judgments."¹²¹ Discarding their own involvement in the development of NIE

¹¹⁹ Harold P. Ford, 17.

¹²⁰ David F. Gordon, ed., 186-187.

¹²¹ David Robarge, 177.

53-63, senior policymakers in the Kennedy Administration concluded that DCI McCone and his analysts at CIA “had produced another authoritative but inaccurate estimate.”¹²²

Realizing that he unduly influenced the development of the NIE, DCI McCone sought to make amends. DCI McCone personally apologized to the analysts and vowed not to involve himself in the development of future NIEs.¹²³ In not questioning the assessment of future NIEs, DCI McCone placed himself at a disadvantage with the majority of policymakers holding an optimistic view of Vietnam.

As the situation in Vietnam worsened from May to July 1963, DCI McCone approved a Special National Intelligence Estimate to update the judgments in NIE 53-63. SNIE 53-2-63 was released in July 1963 with the following revised judgment:

The Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam has highlighted and intensified a widespread and long-standing dissatisfaction with the Diem regime and its style of government. If – as is likely – Diem fails to carry out truly and promptly the commitments he has made to the Buddhists, disorder will probably flare again and the chances of a coup or assassination attempts against him become better than ever...¹²⁴

As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated into August 1963, the Kennedy Administration concluded that the problem was not the U.S. effort but the regime of President Diem. In summer and fall 1963, policymakers within the administration debated the fate of President Diem. These policymakers debated whether they should support a coup against President Diem by the South Vietnamese military. DCI McCone

¹²² David Robarge, 177.

¹²³ Harold P. Ford, 17-18.

¹²⁴ Neil Sheehan, et al., 193.

interjected himself into this debate. Coming after the problems of NIE 53-63, DCI McConc entered this debate in a weak position and left in an even weaker one.

THE FALL OF PRESIDENT NGO DINH DIEM

Background to the Coup Debate

In May 1963, a crisis erupted in South Vietnam that undermined the U.S. effort up to that point. The primary reason for this crisis was the actions of President Diem against the majority Buddhist population in South Vietnam. The crisis began on May 8, 1963. According to Buddhist believers, May 8 is the birthday of the Buddha. To honor the Buddha, Buddhist monks requested the right to wave the flag of Buddha. The Diem government denied their request citing a government edict against the display of other national flags. However a few days before this request the Diem regime allowed the Vatican flag to fly over the city of Hue in honor of Diem's brother, a Cardinal in the Catholic Church. This action infuriated the Buddhist majority population.

Defying government orders, the monks flew the flag of the Buddha on his birthday. Further, thousands of Buddhist monks took to the streets of Hue in celebration of the Buddha's birthday. In retaliation, President Diem ordered the South Vietnamese military to suppress the demonstration. South Vietnamese forces fired on the crowd of monks, killing nine.¹²⁵ Two days later, over ten thousand monks took to the streets of Hue to protest the government's actions. President Diem responded by denouncing the Buddhist movement as a communist front organization and had the

¹²⁵ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam War 1945-1990*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 95.

leaders arrested.¹²⁶ President Diem subsequently ordered the South Vietnamese military to isolate the most active Buddhist pagodas,¹²⁷ around Hue and Saigon. These events in May 1963 invalidated the findings of NIE 53-63. The internal instability in South Vietnam highlighted the weakened position of President Diem.

Through the summer months of 1963, the situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. On June 11, 1963, a Buddhist monk set himself on fire to protest the actions of President Diem. These events shocked senior policymakers in Washington D.C. All the optimistic reporting they received prior to these events was shown to be wrong. For DCI McCone these events led to his decision to allow SNIE 53-63-2 to be published to account for the new situation on the ground.

Throughout June and July 1963, the United States attempted to force President Diem to soften his position and meet the demands of the Buddhists. Each attempt by the U.S. was met by an unyielding President Diem. By August 1963, most policymakers in the Kennedy Administration concluded that the main problem in South Vietnam was the rule of President Diem. President Diem's continued hold on power only served to weaken U.S. efforts to stabilize South Vietnam. In early August, President Diem realized the need to accommodate the U.S. position. President Diem promised the outgoing U.S. Ambassador Fredrick E. Nolting that he would refrain from any future actions against the Buddhist monks.¹²⁸

On August 21, 1963, President Diem broke his promise. Supported by his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, the head of South Vietnam's internal security, President Diem

¹²⁶ Marilyn B. Young, 95.

¹²⁷ Pagodas are temples used by Buddhist monks.

¹²⁸ Neil Sheehan, et al., 166.

ordered the CIA-trained South Vietnamese Special Forces to assault the Buddhist pagodas¹²⁹ across the country. The raid resulted in the arrest of over 1,000 monks.¹³⁰ President Diem's action shocked policymakers in Washington and opened the debate on his fate; however, the debate was not one sided. Policymakers formed into pro- and anti-Diem factions. The anti-Diem faction, primarily the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in South Vietnam, saw the removal of President Diem as the only way for the U.S. to succeed in South Vietnam. The pro-Diem faction, primarily the Defense Department and CIA, saw that there was no other leadership alternative to President Diem and the U.S. had to make the best of a bad situation. DCI McCone was a member of the pro-Diem faction.

The Coup Debate in Washington D.C.

On August 23, 1963, Henry Cabot Lodge replaced Ambassador Notling in South Vietnam. Like the McCone appointment, Lodge, a Republican, was appointed in an attempt to elevate Vietnam policy above partisan politics. With the new ambassador came a new policy for dealing with President Diem. Under Ambassador Notling, U.S. policy was to use persuasion to get President Diem to reform. With Ambassador Lodge, the new policy was to seek alternatives to the Diem's rule if President Diem refused to reform.

The change in policy occurred swiftly, without consent from the major policymakers in the Kennedy Administration. In the last week of August 1963, all major policymakers (President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Rusk, and DCI

¹²⁹ Neil Sheehan, et al., 166.

¹³⁰ Neil Sheehan, et al., 166.

McCone) were out of town on vacation. The anti-Diem faction took advantage of the vacuum in leadership to set in place a new U.S. policy in its relationship with President Diem. Officials in the State Department, Roger Hilsman¹³¹ and W. Averell Harriman¹³² and at the National Security Council, Michael Forrestal,¹³³ sent a cable with new instructions to Ambassador Lodge

[The] US Government cannot tolerate situation in which power lies in Nhu's hands. Diem must be given chance to rid himself of Nhu and his coterie and replace them with best military and political personalities available. If, in spite of all of your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved.¹³⁴

Only after the cable was sent to Ambassador Lodge did President Kennedy see it. After being told that it was supported by officials in State, Defense, and at CIA, President Kennedy approved the message.

DCI McCone never saw the cable. At the time of the cable's transmission, DCI McCone was on vacation in California. Richard Helms, the duty officer at the time, approved the cable, concluding that it was "a policy rather than an intelligence matter."¹³⁵ Mr. Helms never informed DCI McCone. William Colby, working in the CIA Far East Division, saw the cable after it had been approved by the President. Mr. Colby

¹³¹ Roger Hilsman was the Director, Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research from 1961 to 1963. He then became Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1963 to 1964.

¹³² W. Averell Harriman was the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1961 to 1963. He then became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from 1963 to 1965.

¹³³ Michael Forrestal was an aide on the National Security Council from 1962 to 1965.

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol III Vietnam, January-August 1963*, "281. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfi/iii/8177.htm> (accessed May 6, 2008).

¹³⁵ William Colby, *Honorable Men My Life in the CIA*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 210. Hereafter cited as William Colby, *Honorable Men*.

understood the desire of DCI McCone to be informed on all policy related matters. He passed the information to DCI McCone on the cable's content.

Ambassador Lodge understood his new instructions to mean start planning a coup against President Diem. Ambassador Lodge instructed the CIA Station Chief in Saigon, John Richardson, to contact discontented South Vietnamese generals who could lead a coup against President Diem. With DCI McCone unable to communicate with Mr. Richardson, William Colby instructed Richardson to obey the orders of Ambassador Lodge.¹³⁶

On August 29, 1963, President Kennedy met with his senior level advisors to discuss the new policy on President Diem. Deputy Director Marshall Carter represented the CIA. Although not in attendance, DCI McCone passed his concerns through Bundy to President Kennedy. As Bundy relayed, DCI McCone advocated against a coup. DCI McCone recommended the U.S. attempt to persuade Nhu to leave the country voluntarily; however, if a coup was the only option, DCI McCone stated that the U.S. needed assurance that a coup could be successful.¹³⁷

For participants, the true problem rested with Diem's brother and not Diem. Another concern was keeping U.S. involvement in any coup planning to a minimum so as to not let the Diem brothers know about U.S. activities. Bundy summarized the opinion of policymakers, "the coup was [South Vietnamese general's] show and that [the U.S.]

¹³⁶ William Colby, *Honorable Men*, 211.

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "15. Memorandum of Conference With the President," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjv/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

should stick with our plan, which was to support the Vietnamese effort.”¹³⁸ At this meeting President Kennedy made several decisions. The first was for the U.S. military to back up CIA approaches with the South Vietnamese military on coup planning.¹³⁹ The second was Ambassador Lodge had the authority to suspend aid to the Diem regime, after approval from President Kennedy.¹⁴⁰ The third gave Ambassador Lodge authority over all overt and covert operations in South Vietnam.¹⁴¹ In placing CIA covert activities under Ambassador Lodge, the CIA element in Saigon was isolated from DCI McCone’s directions. At the time, Richardson maintained backdoor channels with Nhu. Once Ambassador Lodge gained control of the CIA Station, he denied Richardson from any further contact with Nhu. All communications with Diem and his brother was through Ambassador Lodge alone.

On September 2, 1963, DCI McCone returned to Washington D.C. From September until the actual coup on November 2, DCI McCone held a consistent position. He opposed any attempt to forcefully remove President Diem and his brother from power. DCI McCone always favored using persuasion. There were several factors in his opposition. The first was that any move against Diem distracted from the mission of the

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “15. Memorandum of Conference With the President,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/iv/8202.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

U.S. to combat the communist insurgency in South Vietnam. The second factor was that DCI McCone saw no other leadership alternative to President Diem.¹⁴² The final factor was a fear that a coup could lead to a protracted period of instability in South Vietnam.¹⁴³ Backing DCI McCone's analysis was the analysis of Russell J. Smith, Deputy Director for Intelligence. He presented his analysis to DCI McCone in a memorandum written on September 4, 1963. Mr. Smith's analysis attempted to contradict the opinion of the anti-Diem faction that the war could not be won with President Diem in power. Mr. Smith concluded that the current Buddhist uprising was not affecting the South Vietnamese government's efforts to defeat the VC.¹⁴⁴ According to Mr. Smith, the war could still be won under President Diem.¹⁴⁵

As he had done in the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone laid out his position in a memorandum he used as his talking points with policymakers. In a meeting held on September 12, 1963 with senior policymakers, DCI McCone argued for the U.S. to consider other options instead of a coup. DCI McCone continued to focus on the method of persuasion against the Diem brothers. DCI McCone outlined several steps the U.S. should support in lieu of removing President Diem. DCI McCone argued that the best solution was to remove Nhu from a position of authority and restructure the Diem

¹⁴² David Robarge, 181.

¹⁴³ David Robarge, 181.

¹⁴⁴ "Memorandum about ONE Memo: South Vietnam's Leader, 4 September 1963," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *Memorandum about ONE Memo*, CD-ROM.

¹⁴⁵ *Memorandum about ONE Memo*, CD-ROM

government to bring in more dissents.¹⁴⁶ DCI McCone's final argument was that the use of selective pressure on Diem showed U.S. resolve and that the war effort could continue with Diem still in power.¹⁴⁷ He requested that the CIA be allowed to resume communications with Diem. No actions were taken on any of DCI McCone's recommendations during this meeting.

Throughout the remainder of September 1963, the U.S. held to the position that increased pressure, short of a coup, on President Diem would result in the necessary improvements in his government. However this opinion changed after a visit by Secretary McNamara to Vietnam at the end of September. He concluded that not enough pressure was being placed on President Diem. In his findings to President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara stated that a coup against President Diem was too early and that the U.S. should exert maximum economic and political pressure on President Diem to reform.¹⁴⁸ Secretary McNamara concluded that his recommendations would either lead to reconciliation with President Diem or lead to an eventual coup against Diem.¹⁴⁹

During October 1963, the U.S. position shifted to the realization that a coup was the only available option against President Diem. While the pro-Diem faction still debated the need to remove President Diem, the anti-Diem faction, led by Ambassador Lodge, pressed ahead with planning a coup. DCI McCone's position was so consistent

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "99. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12648.htm> (accessed May 6, 2008).

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "99. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12648.htm> (accessed May 6, 2008).

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "167. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) and the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12651.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "172. Memorandum of Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12651.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

against a coup that policymakers largely ignored him. An internal memorandum at the State Department, written on October 18, 1963, identified DCI McCone as a roadblock to the maintenance of momentum in U.S. policy.¹⁵⁰ The memorandum characterized DCI McCone's opinions as his "familiar visceral feelings."¹⁵¹ According to the State Department officials, any policy not supported by DCI McCone was doomed to fail. In the end, officials at the State Department discarded DCI McCone's advice believing that DCI McCone only wanted to return to the August period where the U.S. remained in tacit support of President Diem.¹⁵²

Although his position was ridiculed by other policymakers, DCI McCone pressed his case directly to President Kennedy throughout the month of October 1963. As the date for the coup approach, DCI McCone "warned President Kennedy personally that removal of Diem would result in not one coup, but several coups – political turmoil that might extend over several years."¹⁵³ In hindsight DCI McCone's analysis was correct when two months after the coup against President Diem, another faction within the South Vietnamese military staged a coup against the military regime.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfv/12678.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfv/12678.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁵² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfv/12678.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

¹⁵³ John McCone, oral interview, 16.

During a meeting with the President at the end of October 1963, DCI McCone summarized the situation in removing President Diem. DCI McCone used a baseball analogy, pointing out that “if I was a manager of a baseball team, and I had one pitcher, I’d keep him in the box whether he was a good pitcher or not.”¹⁵⁴ Although President Kennedy was apprehensive about an impending coup, he never directed Ambassador Lodge to demand the South Vietnamese military to stop their planning. In that vacuum, Ambassador Lodge pressed ahead with coup planning. By the end of October 1963, DCI McCone’s position had been marginalized within the administration, with the U.S. tacitly supporting the South Vietnamese military planned coup against President Diem.

On November 2, 1963, the long planned coup occurred resulting in the removal and execution of Diem and his brother Nhu. Removing Diem forced the U.S. to become more entrenched in the affairs of South Vietnam. During the last two years of DCI McCone’s tenure, his focus remained on Vietnam and finding the right policy; however, this had to be done under a new President, Lyndon Johnson.

¹⁵⁴ Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, (New York: Times Books, 1995) 81-82.

CHAPTER 4

DCI MCCONE AND VIETNAM POLICY IN THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION, 1963-1965

INTRODUCTION

DCI McCone remained head of the IC through the first part of the Johnson Administration (1963-1965). For DCI McCone, the situation in Vietnam remained his most dominant foreign policy issue. Policymakers in the Johnson Administration conducted numerous policy reviews from 1963 to 1965 to find the right formula for success in South Vietnam. DCI McCone remained consistently pessimistic about the chances of success in South Vietnam. Eventually senior policymakers favored and accepted a policy of a gradual escalation of force. The intent of the new policy was to use limited air strikes against North Vietnam in order to pressure it into accepting a negotiated solution. While policymakers coalesced around this policy, DCI McCone's views diverged to favor a more aggressive approach against North Vietnam. DCI McCone saw that the only way to win in Vietnam was to conduct "a fullbore aerial assault on North Vietnam."¹⁵⁵ His policy views evolved through 1964. By 1965, DCI McCone settled on advocating for a large sustained air campaign against North Vietnam. He advocated this policy with President Johnson and other senior policymakers. It was in

¹⁵⁵ David Robarge, 397.

1965, his final months as head of the IC, that DCI McCone “argued himself out of a job.”¹⁵⁶

This chapter focuses on two areas. First this chapter focuses on the problems DCI McCone faced under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson. Next this chapter focuses on DCI McCone’s evolving view of Vietnam policy and how he advocated his position with other policymakers and the President.

WORKING FOR PRESIDENT JOHNSON

President Kennedy’s Style

DCI McCone never adjusted to the leadership style of President Johnson. More comfortable working under President Kennedy’s style, DCI McCone attempted to transplant that leadership style onto President Johnson. Under President Kennedy, advice was sought from a broad range of advisors. President Kennedy did not use the formalized structure of the National Security Council to debate policy matters; he preferred a process where advisors debated issues more openly and directly with him. DCI McCone, while concerned with the lack of NSC meetings, utilized the freewheeling style to gain almost an unrestricted access to President Kennedy. DCI McCone also enjoyed the fact that President Kennedy was interested in all “aspects of intelligence,”¹⁵⁷ and spent time learning for “ways to use the information and capabilities the [IC]

¹⁵⁶ David Robarge, 423.

¹⁵⁷ David Robarge, 72.

afforded him.”¹⁵⁸ President Johnson, on the other hand, never held the same “intellectual curiosity toward intelligence.”¹⁵⁹

Added to the problem of President Johnson’s lack of interest in intelligence was the limited contact the two had while Johnson served as Vice President under Kennedy. The contact between the two men was sporadic at best; DCI McCone felt no obligation to keep the Vice President informed of the world situation.¹⁶⁰ Further complicating this situation was a directive by President Kennedy to deny giving the *President’s Intelligence Checklist* (the precursor to today’s *President Daily Brief*) to Vice President Johnson due to their past political rivalry.¹⁶¹ With little to no interaction between the two, the moment Lyndon Johnson became President was a cold start for the both of them.

President Johnson’s Style

When Johnson assumed the presidency, the key change he made was to restrict access. Shifting away from the NSC, President Johnson’s main policy formulation board was the Tuesday Lunch Group.¹⁶² President Johnson utilized the NSC format merely as a method of confirming already agreed to policy positions developed by the President and a small group of advisors. President Johnson preferred a smaller and more closely knit

¹⁵⁸ David Robarge, 72.

¹⁵⁹ David Robarge, 72.

¹⁶⁰ John Helgerson, *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates*, “Chapter 3: Into Politics with Kennedy and Johnson,” Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/cia-briefings-of-presidential-candidates/cia-6.htm> (accessed May 15, 2008). Hereafter cited as John Helgerson, *CIA Briefings*.

¹⁶¹ John Helgerson, *CIA Briefings*.

¹⁶² Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 318.

group of advisors, who basically agreed with his positions.¹⁶³ The key players in the group were Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and NSC Advisor Bundy. In time Secretary McNamara became the most dominant policy advisor to President Johnson. Although DCI McCone had a good working relation with Secretary Rusk, his relationship with Bundy and McNamara were strained since the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁶⁴

With few allies, DCI McCone's views were not supported by other members of the Tuesday Lunch Group. The group met from February 1964 until September 1964, with DCI McCone only attending six of the 27 lunch groups that met during that time.¹⁶⁵ When the Tuesday Lunch Group resumed meeting in March 1965, DCI McCone attended none of those meetings.¹⁶⁶ It was this group that determined future Vietnam policy. Unable to get access to President Johnson, DCI McCone became frustrated in his job. Believing that his opinions and advice were not listened to, DCI McCone contemplated resigning on two occasions. The first in the summer of 1964; however, President Johnson dissuaded him, asking him to hold on until after the Presidential elections in the fall of 1964. The second time was in April 1965, which President Johnson accepted.

¹⁶³ Harold P. Ford, 40-41.

¹⁶⁴ David Robarge, 356.

¹⁶⁵ David Robarge, 356.

¹⁶⁶ David Robarge, 356.

DCI MCCONE AND VIETNAM 1963-1964

The Transition

Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency after the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. With no transition time, President Johnson inherited not only the foreign policy challenges faced by President Kennedy but he also inherited the entire national security apparatus of the Kennedy Administration. In needing stability and continuity, President Johnson decided to keep all of President Kennedy's advisors in place.

The first meeting between DCI McCone and the new President occurred on 23 November 1963 in the office of National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. The outcome of that first meeting has been debated. Two participants, Russell J. Smith and Chester Cooper, presented two divergent views of what occurred during the meeting. Russell J. Smith, Deputy Director for Intelligence, accompanied DCI McCone on that meeting. Mr. Smith recalls the meeting as follows:

We found the newly installed president in the basement secretarial offices. He came out of McGeorge Bundy's office and stood amid the clutter of secretaries typing and telephones ringing and talked briefly with McCone and me. Besides the compact, trim McCone he looked massive, rumpled, and worried. He had no interest whatsoever in being briefed, and after some inconsequential chatting, he turned back into Bundy's office. We had no way of knowing it, but we had just witnessed a preview of McCone's future relationship with Lyndon Johnson.¹⁶⁷

Chester Cooper, who worked for Bundy at the NSC, presents a different interpretation of the meeting. According to his version,

¹⁶⁷ Russell J. Smith, 190.

McCone and the President went into Bundy's office... Bundy and I waited outside. McCone came away from that short meeting tremendously impressed with the new President's self control. He had listened carefully, and asked some searching questions. He told the Director he would ask for another detailed briefing.¹⁶⁸

In his memoirs, President Johnson supported Mr. Cooper's version of the meeting.¹⁶⁹

Why the two different perspectives of the same meeting? Mr. Smith may have written his account to place the blame of the strained relations on President Johnson and chose one single point that highlighted the failed relations between the two men. In reality the relationship between the two men deteriorated over time, with DCI McCone pressing his views on an increasingly uninterested President. From DCI McCone's perspective, this meeting and subsequent meetings with the President served only to further his case for a more active role in policy formulation.

DCI McCone in a memorandum written several days after their first meeting leaves the impression that President Johnson wanted to rely heavily on his advice in policy matters.

He said that he felt my work in intelligence was of greatest importance, but he did not wish me to confine myself to this role. He said that he had observed that I had rather carefully avoided expressing myself on policy or suggesting courses of action and he suggested that it might be for interdepartmental reasons that I would wish to continue to do this in meetings (which he felt was a mistake), but nevertheless he invited and would welcome my coming to him from time to time with suggestions of courses of action on policy matters which, in my opinion, were wise even though they were not consistent with

¹⁶⁸ Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), 221-222.

¹⁶⁹ Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 22.

advice he was receiving from responsible people.¹⁷⁰

Several weeks later, in another meeting, DCI McCone again leaves the impression that President Johnson sought to expand the DCI's role.

At breakfast the President immediately brought up his desire to change the image of the DCI from a cloak and dagger role to the role of an adviser to the President on world situations derived from intelligence sources which were of importance to the President in reaching policy decisions. For this reason he intended to call upon me for a great many activities which would be different from those of the past.¹⁷¹

For the remainder of his term, DCI McCone's actions followed this perceived guidance given by President Johnson. DCI McCone assumed that President Johnson desired his input on policy matters. However, DCI McCone's "candor in providing advice to the President eventually led to a strained relationship."¹⁷² Believing he could express himself more openly on policy matters, specifically on the Vietnam War, only isolated DCI McCone within the administration.

Setting the Course on the Vietnam War under President Johnson

DCI McCone, from the start of the Johnson Administration, focused primarily on the situation in Vietnam. DCI McCone maintained a consistently pessimistic outlook on Vietnam; however, his view on the correct policy was an evolutionary process that started in 1963 and was completed by the end of 1964. Almost immediately after assuming

¹⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "112. Memorandum for the Record," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfk/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 7, 2008).

¹⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol. XXV Organization of Foreign Policy; Information Policy; United Nations; Scientific Matters*, "115. Memorandum for the Record," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfk/xxv/6009.htm> (accessed June 7, 2008).

¹⁷² John Helgeson, CIA Briefings.

office, President Johnson experienced the divergent views of his policymakers and DCI McCone.

On November 25, 1963, Ambassador Lodge updated President Johnson on the situation in Vietnam after the coup against President Diem. In notes taken from the meeting, DCI McCone relayed that Ambassador Lodge's statements were "optimistic, hopeful, and left the President with the impression that we are on the road to victory."¹⁷³ When asked for his opinion, DCI McCone stated that his assessment "was much less encouraging."¹⁷⁴ DCI McCone stated VC activity had not been stopped and the new South Vietnamese government was too weak to challenge the VC. He concluded there was "no basis for an optimistic forecast of the future."¹⁷⁵ In this meeting President Johnson agreed that the situation was serious but not to the extent portrayed by DCI McCone.¹⁷⁶ President Johnson then focused on the need to improve the situation in Vietnam and work to stabilize the new government.

On November 26, 1963, President Johnson approved National Security Action Memorandum no. 273, establishing the policy the United States followed in Vietnam as well as demanding policymakers work together.

It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all U.S. decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.

¹⁷³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "330. Memorandum for the Record of Meeting," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjv/12673.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁷⁴ Lyndon Johnson, 43.

¹⁷⁵ Lyndon Johnson, 43.

¹⁷⁶ Lyndon Johnson, 43.

The President expects that all senior officers of the Government will move energetically to insure the full unity of support for established U.S. policy in South Vietnam. Both in Washington and in the field, it is essential that the Government be unified. It is of particular importance that express or implied criticism of officers of other branches be scrupulously avoided in all contacts with the Vietnamese Government and with the press.¹⁷⁷

In the first months of the Johnson Presidency, DCI McCone largely tracked with the opinions of other policymakers on the situation in Vietnam.

In December 1963, DCI McCone, along with Secretary McNamara, conducted a fact finding mission to Vietnam. During this visit, both McCone and McNamara shared the same outlook on the future prospects in Vietnam. In his report to the President, Secretary McNamara stated that the situation in Vietnam was “very disturbing.”¹⁷⁸ Secretary McNamara found faults not only in the new South Vietnamese government but also in the effort made by the U.S. team in South Vietnam.¹⁷⁹ In the end Secretary McNamara argued that the situation is reversible but opened the door for a more aggressive U.S. response if the situation did not improve.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “331. National Security Action Memorandum No. 273,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12673.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, “374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjff/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

While DCI McCone agreed with many of Secretary McNamara's conclusions, DCI McCone felt "a little less pessimistic than [McNamara]."¹⁸¹ From DCI McCone's perspective the main problem stemmed from allowing the coup against Diem to proceed, with the new government in South Vietnam unable to counter the improving strength of the VC. DCI McCone concluded that "there are more reasons to doubt the future of the effort under present programs...than there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of our cause in South Vietnam."¹⁸² In the end President Johnson listened to the advice of Secretary McNamara. President Johnson concluded that "[McNamara's] judgment was closer to the hard truth."¹⁸³ While Secretary McNamara shared DCI McCone's pessimistic views on Vietnam it did not deter him from finding the right policy to follow and "pursue the war effort."¹⁸⁴ By the end of December 1963, Secretary McNamara started to gain the ear of President Johnson, convinced that he shared the "determination to find a winning formula."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "375. Letter From the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone) to President Johnson," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjif/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁸² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol IV Vietnam, August-December 1963*, "375. Letter From the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone) to President Johnson," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjif/iv/12675.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁸³ Lyndon Johnson, 64.

¹⁸⁴ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 90.

¹⁸⁵ Fredrik Logevall, 91.

The March 1964 Visit to Vietnam

In January 1964, General Nguyen Khanh¹⁸⁶ led a coup against the military government in South Vietnam. In ousting the government, any relative stability gained in South Vietnam was lost. Viewing the current situation in South Vietnam the IC published SNIE 50-64, *Short Term Prospects in South Vietnam*, on 12 February 1964. The SNIE supported DCI McCone's previous negative outlook on South Vietnam, concluding:

That the situation in South Vietnam is very serious, and prospects uncertain. Even with US assistance approximately as it is now, we believe that; unless there is a marked improvement in the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Government and armed forces, South Vietnam has at best an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months.¹⁸⁷

By March 1964, the situation in Vietnam had not improved. As a result, President Johnson ordered his top advisors back to Vietnam for another assessment. DCI McCone observed the new situation and presented his case for action. On March 3, 1964, DCI McCone wrote a memorandum to Bundy. After observing the changes in South Vietnam, DCI McCone concluded "that the situation is worse now than it was in December and therefore I am more pessimistic of the future of the American cause in South Vietnam than my December report reflects."¹⁸⁸ DCI McCone next moved to his own analysis of

¹⁸⁶ Genral Nguyen Khanh was a general in the South Vietnamese Army who participated in the coup against President Diem. In 1963, General Khanh was Deputy Chief of Staff of the South Vietnamese Army. From 1964 – 1965, he served as Prime Minister of South Vietnam. In 1965 he became President of South Vietnam. He was overthrown in February 1965.

¹⁸⁷ "SNIE 50-64, *Short Term Prospects in South Vietnam*," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

the possible course of actions the U.S. should follow. The first course was for the U.S. to accept a neutral South Vietnam.¹⁸⁹ The second course was maintain the status quo and hope for the best.¹⁹⁰ A third was to increase U.S. involvement in South Vietnam.¹⁹¹ A final course of action was to expand the operation into North Vietnam.¹⁹²

While DCI McCone viewed the fourth course of action favorably, he believed that the relative instability in South Vietnam precluded the application of this course, at the time. Another aspect that precluded taking the fight to North Vietnam was the potential escalation of the war, bringing in China. DCI McCone, making his own assessment, concluded that the threat of Chinese intervention was nonexistent. He argued that, in his opinion, U.S. attacks against North Vietnam was not worth China intervening.¹⁹³ In the end DCI McCone concluded that, at the time, “carrying the war to North Vietnam would not win the war in South Vietnam.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed June 21, 2008).

¹⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “68. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone),” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

Supporting DCI McCone's arguments was an internal analysis done by the CIA in February 1963. This analysis was done at DCI McCone's personal request and not disseminated to other policymakers.¹⁹⁵ According to the CIA analysts the South Vietnamese population is neither siding with the government or with the VC, but are more "responsive to the latter because it fears the VC."¹⁹⁶ Accordingly the South Vietnamese government needed to reassert itself with its own population and take the fight to the VC. The analysts concluded that "the new regime will enjoy stability in direct proportion to the degree it galvanizes and energizes the government apparatus...."¹⁹⁷ In order to pursue this option in the future, DCI McCone argued for a series of steps the U.S. should take to strengthen the South Vietnamese government.

In laying out his position for a harsher push against North Vietnam, McCone placed himself at odds with other policymakers who looked for a more measured approach. It was during the March 1964 visit that Secretary McNamara and DCI McCone diverged on the outlook for success. In his report presented to the President on March 16, 1964, Secretary McNamara highlighted his proposed course of actions, including areas where DCI McCone dissented. In highlighting DCI McCone's dissent, Secretary McNamara minimized DCI McCone's case. Secretary McNamara highlighted

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "38. Report From the Executive Director-Comptroller of Central Intelligence (Kirkpatrick) and the Station Chief in Saigon (de Silva) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed July 1, 2008).

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "38. Report From the Executive Director-Comptroller of Central Intelligence (Kirkpatrick) and the Station Chief in Saigon (de Silva) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed July 1, 2008).

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "38. Report From the Executive Director-Comptroller of Central Intelligence (Kirkpatrick) and the Station Chief in Saigon (de Silva) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/28_69.html (accessed July 1, 2008).

two areas of disagreement with DCI McCone, the stability of the current South Vietnamese government and future combat operations against North Vietnam.

In discussing the status of the South Vietnamese government, Secretary McNamara argued that the South Vietnamese government was far more stable than what DCI McCone believed. Secretary McNamara concluded that “evidences of energy, comprehension, and decision add up to a sufficiently strong chance of Khanh’s [government] really taking hold in the next few months for us to devote all possible energy and resources to his support.”¹⁹⁸ Secretary McNamara pointed out DCI McCone’s dissent by stating that DCI McCone only believed there was insufficient data to make a determination on the Khanh’s government.¹⁹⁹ Secretary McNamara ignored DCI McCone’s recommendations on steps to strengthen the South Vietnamese government. As for future operations against North Vietnam, Secretary McNamara argued that any actions against North Vietnam could result in destabilizing the new South Vietnamese government.

By the end of his report Secretary McNamara concluded “that the situation in South Vietnam can be significantly improved in the next four to six months.”²⁰⁰ He then highlighted DCI McCone’s opposition “that the situation in South Vietnam is so serious

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

that it calls for more immediate and positive action than I have proposed.”²⁰¹ In giving President Johnson a case for future action for Vietnam, Secretary McNamara gained the upper hand in the policy debate, summing up DCI McCone’s arguments as a case of any action taken as “too little, too late.”²⁰² Secretary McNamara made twelve recommendations to the President. The most important recommendations were for increased support to the South Vietnamese government, an increase in the size of the South Vietnamese military, and to limit U.S. military operations to South Vietnam but be in position to commence operations against the North, if needed.²⁰³

Presented with a positive course of action to follow in Vietnam, President Johnson accepted the advice of Secretary McNamara. Secretary McNamara assured the President that “if we carry out energetically the proposals..., Khanh can stem the tide in South Vietnam, and within four to six months, improve the situation there.”²⁰⁴ On March 17, 1964, President Johnson ordered the release of National Security Action Memorandum No. 288, which approved in total the recommendations of Secretary McNamara.²⁰⁵ In accepting all of Secretary McNamara’s proposals, President Johnson

²⁰¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “84. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 19, 2008).

²⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “86. Summary Record of the 524th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 17, 1964, Noon,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “87. National Security Action Memorandum No. 288,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/70_107.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

had in effect discounted DCI McCone's arguments. By presenting DCI McCone's case as only seeing the negative in all situations, Secretary McNamara successfully minimized DCI McCone's influence in President Johnson's eyes. By the end of March 1964, President Johnson "had lost confidence in McCone."²⁰⁶

The Summer and Fall Debates

As the war progressed through the summer of 1964, the situation on the ground in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. Policymakers in Washington D.C. looked for a new policy to improve the situation. Secretary McNamara described the new policy.

Its opening moves would include a congressional resolution and communication with Hanoi, followed by a series of graduated military pressures, culminating in limited air attacks against North Vietnam.²⁰⁷

The IC examined this new policy in SNIE 50-2-64, *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, published on May 25, 1964. According to the SNIE, in the short term, initial responses from North Vietnam may result in accepting a negotiated solution.²⁰⁸ However if U.S. attacks persisted, North Vietnam "might intermittently step up the tempo of the insurrection in South Vietnam."²⁰⁹ The one unresolved issue in the SNIE was the threshold of where North Vietnam would capitulate

²⁰⁶ John Helgerson, CIA Briefings.

²⁰⁷ Robert McNamara, 121.

²⁰⁸ "SNIE 50-2-64, *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *SNIE 50-2-64, Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, CD-ROM.

²⁰⁹ *SNIE 50-2-64, Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, CD-ROM.

to U.S. attacks and accept a negotiated settlement over regime destruction.²¹⁰ Only seeing the short-term benefits Secretary McNamara assumed that the analysis from the SNIE supported the new policy. From Secretary McNamara's perspective, the SNIE "concluded there was a reasonable chance such a plan would lead Hanoi to reduce the level of insurgency."²¹¹

In South Vietnam, General Khanh was unable to mobilize his country to fight against the VC. At the same time the South Vietnamese people also suffered from leaders who were "under-trained and over-worked."²¹² Frustrated with the lack of progress in South Vietnam, President Johnson ordered his top advisors to Honolulu, Hawaii in June 1964 to discuss the situation and present revised recommendations.

DCI McCone participated in these discussions in Honolulu and presented to the assembled audience a consistently negative assessment. From the records of the conference, DCI McCone never addressed the conclusions of SNIE 50-2-64. He maintained his pessimistic outlook on Vietnam. On June 2, 1964, DCI McCone summarized his view seeing "the downward spiral as continuing."²¹³ According to DCI McCone there was an erosion of the will to fight on the part of the South Vietnamese.²¹⁴ Coming out of this conference was another series of recommendations from Secretary

²¹⁰ SNIE 50 SNIE 50-2-64, *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, CD-ROM.

²¹¹ Robert McNamara, 121.

²¹² Chester Cooper, 232.

²¹³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "189. Summary Record of Meetings, Honolulu, June 2, 1964, 8:30-11:50 a.m. and 2:15-4 p.m.," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/181_225.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, "189. Summary Record of Meetings, Honolulu, June 2, 1964, 8:30-11:50 a.m. and 2:15-4 p.m.," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/181_225.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

McNamara. First the United States military needed to push South Vietnamese forces into the provinces to counter the VC. Second the U.S. needed to increase the number of U.S. military advisors. However, one action not agreed to were air strikes against the North. Secretary McNamara concluded that it was “unlikely that a strike against the north would be desirable at any time within the next 3 to 6 months.”²¹⁵ To policymakers the fear of a wider war, drawing in China, negated the advantages of massive air strikes against North Vietnam.

Muddling through the summer of 1964, U.S. policy and action changed dramatically in August when North Vietnamese boats attacked two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. Navy was operating near the North Vietnamese coastline in support of U.S. and South Vietnamese covert operations. The Gulf of Tonkin incident resulted in a radical shift in U.S. policy and a dramatic escalation of U.S. operations against North Vietnam. At the time of the debate, Secretary McNamara realized that limited combat operations against North Vietnam were necessary. With Secretary McNamara pushing for surgical strikes against North Vietnam, DCI McCone cautioned the assembled group about the outcome of only conducting limited strikes. DCI McCone stated that “proposed U.S. reprisals will result in a sharp North Vietnamese military reaction.”²¹⁶ Further DCI McCone attempted to justify North Vietnamese actions

The President: Do they want a war by attacking our ships in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin?

Director McCone: No. The North Vietnamese are reacting

²¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “201. Paper Prepared for the President by the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), Washington, June 5, 1964,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/181_225.html (accessed May 29, 2008).

²¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “278. Summary Notes of the 538th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, August 4, 1964, 6:15-6:40 p.m.,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

defensively to our attacks on their off-shore islands. They are responding out of pride and on the basis of defense considerations. The attack is a signal to us that the North Vietnamese have the will and determination to continue the war. They are raising the ante.²¹⁷

President Johnson not wanting to appear weak accepted the need to conduct reprisals against North Vietnam. To solidify his position, he demanded support from the U.S. Congress. Within days, Congress approved, with massive majorities, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to authorize the President “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”²¹⁸

As the U.S. prepared to take the fight to North Vietnam, the situation in the south remained tenuous, with the South Vietnamese government unable to provide any form of stability. CIA analysts concluded in SNIE 53-64, published on September 8, 1964, that “at present the odds are against the emergence of a stable government capable of effectively prosecuting the war in South Vietnam.”²¹⁹ However, at the same time, Bundy concluded that “Khanh will probably stay in control and may make some headway in the next 2-3 months in strengthening the government.”²²⁰ In his memorandum, Bundy presented the President with several options including continued maritime operations and surgical, limited strikes against North Vietnam. He did not argue for any expanded air operation against North Vietnam. During a meeting with President Johnson, on

²¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “278. Summary Notes of the 538th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, August 4, 1964, 6:15-6:40 p.m.,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²¹⁸ Thomas E. Gort, “Joint Resolution of Congress H.J. RES 1145 August 7, 1964,” <http://www.hbci.com/~tgort/tonkin.htm> (accessed May 20, 2008).

²¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “341. Special National Intelligence Estimate,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/339_345.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²²⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “342. Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/339_345.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

September 8, 1964, DCI McCone sided with the recommendations of Bundy, stating that the “recommended actions were appropriate, and that a sustained air attack at present would be dangerous because of the weakness of the [South Vietnamese government].”²²¹

In November 1964, the NSC conducted another systematic review of Vietnam policy. With representatives from all major agencies, including CIA, the group worked to define three possible options for the U.S. to follow in Vietnam: option A was for the U.S. to conduct reprisal strikes against North Vietnam, if needed,²²² option B called for a “program of sudden, severe, intensive bombings,”²²³ against North Vietnam, and finally option C called for “graduated airstrikes,”²²⁴ against North Vietnam. These discussions became the basis for U.S. policy for the “balance of (DCI) McCone’s tenure.”²²⁵

During the debate, the group considered that option A was overcome by events on the ground and that additional steps needed to be taken. The group also ruled out option B as too dramatic that could widen the war beyond the control of the U.S.²²⁶ The group coalesced around option C with the U.S. undertaking “a gradually escalating program of military actions, including airstrikes against the North, as a way to coerce Hanoi into negotiating.”²²⁷

²²¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol I Vietnam, 1964*, “343. Memorandum of a Meeting, White House, Washington, September 9, 1964, 11 a.m.,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i/339_345.html (accessed May 20, 2008).

²²² Harold P. Ford, 68.

²²³ Harold P. Ford, 68.

²²⁴ Harold P. Ford, 68.

²²⁵ David Robarge, 402.

²²⁶ David Robarge, 402.

²²⁷ David Robarge, 402.

DCI McCone's position was still evolving. He did not like the "efficacy of the incremental approach,"²²⁸ which option C presented. He clearly favored harsher action against North Vietnam, but the relative instability of the South precluded any dramatic push in that direction.²²⁹ In the end, President Johnson sided with the analysis of the NSC group and accepted option C as U.S. policy. On December 7, 1964, President Johnson approved a new policy for the United States in Vietnam. The new policy was implemented in two phases. In the first phase, starting in early December 1964, "covert operations and aerial reconnaissance flights [into North Vietnam] would be intensified."²³⁰ In January 1965, the second phase began. In the second phase, "an escalating series of aerial attacks against North Vietnam would commence."²³¹ From this point, DCI McCone observed the new policy in action and concluded that more action was needed and looked towards continuous, intensified air strikes as the solution.

DCI MCCONE'S FINAL DAYS, 1965

Pursuing the Harder Line

In January 1965, DCI McCone recognized that the South Vietnamese government may never reach the level of stability he desired. DCI McCone switched his advocacy to following the harder line regardless of the situation in the south. In policy terms, DCI

²²⁸ David Robarge, 403.

²²⁹ David Robarge, 403.

²³⁰ David Robarge, 403.

²³¹ David Robarge, 403.

McCone came to embrace the assumptions around option B,²³² the massive air strikes against North Vietnam. While DCI McCone's position evolved to quicker action against North Vietnam, several other policymakers, such as Secretary McNamara, still held to the slow escalatory approach. DCI McCone was convinced that his path was the correct one to achieve success in Vietnam. DCI McCone concluded that the only way for the U.S. to accomplish its objectives in South Vietnam required "substantially increased air strikes against [North Vietnam]."²³³ DCI McCone not only tried to persuade other policymakers but also appealed directly to President Johnson. From February 1965 until his resignation in April 1965, DCI McCone made a concerted effort to get policymakers to accept his views.

On February 3, 1965, DCI McCone held a private meeting with President Johnson to layout his view on the current situation in Vietnam. Not only did he discuss intelligence matters but DCI McCone also offered policy recommendations to President Johnson. First, DCI McCone commented on the weakness of the South Vietnamese government, which was unable to provide any form of stability in the south. DCI McCone concluded that the current government's days in power were "numbered."²³⁴ Second, DCI McCone stated that the policy the President approved last winter was a path that could lead to defeat.

We could not win the way we were going and therefore we must take military action against North Vietnam. I advocated bombing of selected targets in North Vietnam, starting in the south and working north and carrying the raids on intensively, that is at

²³² David Robarge, 404.

²³³ David Robarge, 404.

²³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "61. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/56_70.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

least one a day. I said that we should gradually work towards the north but should not strike deeply into North Vietnam territory.²³⁵

When questioned by the President whether these action could bring China into the conflict, DCI McCone was dismissive of any threat.

I said there was a possibility that they would come in on the ground but they had little capability in the air. I said we had to face this contingency and be prepared to handle any possible development but added that while Chinese Communist ground intervention was a possibility, I did not estimate it as a probability under the course of action advocated.²³⁶

This was the line of argument DCI McCone followed for the remainder of his tenure, strike North Vietnam without worrying about the potential consequences.

On February 7, 1965, the VC attacked a U.S. base at Plicku, South Vietnam resulting in numerous U.S. casualties. In response to these attacks, U.S. policymakers supported increased reprisal attacks against North Vietnam.²³⁷ This escalation led to the decision for the commencement of Operation ROLLING THUNDER. Following a visit to Vietnam, in early February 1965, Bundy presented the President and other policymakers a proposal for sustained, escalatory strikes against North Vietnam. In advocating this method, Bundy rejected the proposals of DCI McCone for a massive strike against the North. Bundy argued that “the best available way of increasing our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of sustained

²³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “61. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/56_70.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “61. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/56_70.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²³⁷ Robert McNamara, 170.

reprisal against North Vietnam.”²³⁸

The recommended policy was debated by the National Security Council in a meeting on February 8, 1965. Two written accounts of this meeting exist, one by the White House and the second by DCI McCone. In the White House version, the only item DCI McCone brought up was that Chinese reactions to U.S. actions will most likely be limited in nature.²³⁹ DCI McCone, on the other hand, used this meeting as another avenue to present his arguments for a more dynamic response to North Vietnam. DCI McCone believed the U.S. “should pursue a systematic series of attacks against targets, starting in the south sector of North Vietnam and that we should work toward the north.”²⁴⁰ According to DCI McCone, he could not accept the proposals of Bundy.

At this point I expressed very strong opinion that I felt that our actions would not be positive enough, and would not be taken in a sustained and consistent manner. I urged that we organize to strike every day or at least every second day and that we carry it on regardless of what the Soviets say or what the Chinese Communists say or what anybody else says. In other words, my differing with the proposals of Bundy was that I proposed a more rapid cadence of the operation.²⁴¹

Unwilling to conduct operations to the extent advocated by DCI McCone, President Johnson accepted Bundy’s proposals. DCI McCone made the same arguments at another NSC meeting on February 10, 1965, advocating “very strongly an immediate U.S./[South

²³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “84. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/81_86.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “87. Summary Notes of the 547th Meeting of the National Security Council,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/87_95.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “88. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/87_95.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “88. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/87_95.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

Vietnamese] [air] strike of substantial proportions and urged that this be done promptly.”²⁴²

Weighing in on the reaction to a U.S. air campaign was a special national intelligence estimate. SNIE 10-3/1-65, published on February 18, 1965, concluded that the type of air campaign advocated by Bundy would not cause North Vietnam to back down; in fact the most likely reaction by North Vietnam “would probably be to continue their pressures in the South.”²⁴³ Directed by DCI McCone to examine his own proposal for a larger air campaign, the analysts at CIA sided with DCI McCone’s position. The SNIE concluded that a more sustained and aggressive air campaign could result in North Vietnam accepting conditions to negotiate with the U.S.²⁴⁴ In reference to possible Chinese intervention, SNIE 10-3/1-65 sided with DCI McCone’s assessment. The SNIE concluded that China would not “intervene in Vietnam with substantial military forces.”²⁴⁵ DCI McCone, in a letter to the President, pointed out that the IC’s analysis gave greater weight to his policy proposal.²⁴⁶

Rejecting this advice, President Johnson sided with Bundy’s proposal and ordered the commencement of air strikes against North Vietnam under Operation ROLLING

²⁴² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “99. Memorandum for the Record,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/96_99.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴³ “SNIE 10-3/1-65, *Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*,” in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁴⁴ *SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁴⁵ *SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Course of Actions Against North Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, “196. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Johnson,” http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/195_198.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

THUNDER. Supporting limited air operations against North Vietnam also had a secondary effect of increasing U.S. ground troops into South Vietnam.²⁴⁷ The expanded U.S. air bases in South Vietnam required additional U.S. ground forces to protect them.

Advocating and Leaving

In his last months, DCI McCone pushed several policymakers to accept his prescription on Vietnam. However in several discussions, DCI McCone's method of pointing out the failures of the established U.S. policy and the rightness of his own position further alienated and isolated him. In a discussion with Secretary McNamara on March 18, 1965, DCI McCone reminded Secretary McNamara of the correctness of his position. According to DCI McCone, Secretary McNamara agreed with his position that the current air campaign was ineffective.²⁴⁸ DCI McCone then reminded Secretary McNamara that it was the conclusion of the IC that the air campaign could not succeed and pointed out that a more forceful air campaign will reach the level of success desired by the U.S.

During April 1965, his final month in office, DCI McCone continued to push policymakers and the President to accept his position. The catalyst for the push was an April 1, 1965 NSC meeting where President Johnson approved an increase in U.S. ground forces but not an increase in the air campaign against North Vietnam.²⁴⁹ DCI McCone relayed his displeasure in the new mission for the U.S.

²⁴⁷ Robert McNamara, 174.

²⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*. "206. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/ab_out_state/history/vol_ii/202_220.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁴⁹ David Robarge, 410.

I wished to point out that the air strikes have not brought an indication that the DRV are softening in their attitude--if anything they have hardened their position. I stated that I felt we must consider this carefully in view of yesterday's decision to change the mission of the ground forces.²⁵⁰

Recognizing that President Johnson had no intention of withdrawing from Vietnam, DCI McCone continued to advocate his position for a massive air campaign.²⁵¹ By then his own frustration of being isolated finally compelled DCI McCone to offer his resignation, which was accepted by President Johnson on April 2, 1965. DCI McCone remained in his position until the U.S. Senate approved his successor, retired Vice Admiral William Rabron. DCI McCone's last day in office was set for April 28, 1965. Free from the burdens of keeping his job, DCI McCone continued to push his position until his last day in office.

On April 21, 1965, President Johnson's principal advisors met to discuss a new proposal from Secretary McNamara to increase U.S. ground forces in Vietnam by an additional 30,000 troops, bringing the total ground force to roughly 80,000 troops.²⁵² Secretary McNamara also argued that the current air campaign was sufficient to bring enough pressure on North Vietnam to seek a negotiated solution.²⁵³ DCI McCone took issue with this assessment pointing out:

²⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "232. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/221_240.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵¹ David Robarge, 406.

²⁵² U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "265. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵³ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "265. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

...that the level of our bombing against [North Vietnam] had undoubtedly inconvenienced and created difficulties for the VC and the [North Vietnam] in their supply and infiltration operations but had not brought them to a halt, and I felt a continuation of such bombing could be absorbed by the DRV and would stiffen their determination rather than bring them to the conference table.²⁵⁴

DCI McCone reminded the President that the IC agreed with him on the effectiveness of the air campaign.²⁵⁵ Policymakers, hearing the same critique from DCI McCone discounted DCI McCone's position.

Analysts from the IC continued to press policymakers on the weakness of their assumptions of the air campaign. In a memorandum to policymakers on April 21, 1965, CIA analysts offered several conclusions based on the decision to conduct the air campaign at current levels and to increase U.S. ground forces to 80,000 troops.²⁵⁶ The main conclusion offered was that without an increase in the air campaign, North Vietnam most likely would continue to follow their current policy of supporting the VC with "additional men and equipment."²⁵⁷ With the IC firmly supporting DCI McCone, any further analysis offered by the IC under DCI McCone's tenure were ignored by policymakers. On April 21, 1965, President Johnson committed to a path of increased ground presence without the adjoining increase in air activity.

DCI McCone, distraught over the decision, recorded a conversation with Secretary of State Rusk. While continuing to point out the flaws in the current policy,

²⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "266. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "266. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/261_270.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵⁶ "Memo Reactions to a US Course of Action in Vietnam," in *Estimative Products on Vietnam 1948-1975*, (Washington D.C., National Intelligence Council, April 2005), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *Memo Reactions to a US Course of Action in Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

²⁵⁷ *Memo Reactions to a US Course of Action in Vietnam*, CD-ROM.

DCI McCone highlighted the comments made to him by Secretary Rusk. In Secretary Rusk's opinion, DCI McCone's position was non-supportable.

Rusk said that we could not be sure that carrying the bombing north would bring them to the conference table. [McCone] pointed out that the existing estimate was that when the industrial north was threatened, they very probably would seek some form of negotiation. Rusk replied that the policies of the April 21st paper were not made hurriedly, that my letter of April 2nd had been thoughtfully considered, and the decision to pursue the war on the basis outlined in the April 21st paper was deliberately made after extended discussions between McNamara, Rusk and Bundy.²⁵⁸

On his final day as DCI, April 28, 1965, DCI McCone met with the President. In that meeting DCI McCone expressed his opposition to the policy position advocated by Secretary McNamara and supported by the NSC.²⁵⁹ Included in his discussion was a letter he gave the President laying out his views on the current policy. DCI McCone argued for the U.S. to conduct more aggressive air strikes against the North. As DCI McCone described the scene after giving the letter to President Johnson, the President took it and "placed it on his desk without comment."²⁶⁰ DCI McCone concluded his meeting and observed "this is as far as I can go or, for that matter, as far as the Agency should go in this matter, which is of a strictly policy nature."²⁶¹

Why was DCI McCone's position not supported by President Johnson and other policymakers? Beyond the fact that President Johnson had lost confidence in DCI

²⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "275. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "278. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "278. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

²⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "278. Memorandum for the Record," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed May 21, 2008).

McCone, another factor was the fear of Chinese intervention if the U.S. dramatically increased air attacks against North Vietnam. While DCI McCone minimized the possibility of Chinese intervention, several policymakers “felt that the risks of a sharply increased air war, including the possibility of deeper Chinese and Soviet involvement, outweighed the possible advantages.”²⁶² In the end President Johnson accepted the views of these advisors over the view of DCI McCone.

Another perspective on DCI McCone’s position came from Secretary McNamara, arguing that the air strikes alone could not change the opinion of North Vietnam; it also required an increase in ground activities in South Vietnam.²⁶³ According to Secretary McNamara, following DCI McCone’s logic meant an air campaign “short of genocide.”²⁶⁴ Following the departure of DCI McCone, senior policymakers continued to grope with the proper course of action for the Vietnam War. The final decision was made in July 1965, having ignored the intelligence provided, to commit to an open ended conflict in Vietnam. President Johnson ordered a massive increase in U.S. ground combat forces, and shifting U.S. ground forces to an active combat role against North Vietnam and the VC. What President Johnson did not do was order an increase in the air campaign, siding with Secretary McNamara’s analysis. In the end, DCI McCone, attempting to be a policy advocate, caused him to lose influence with other policymakers.

²⁶² Lyndon Johnson, 140.

²⁶³ Robert McNamara, 180.

²⁶⁴ Robert McNamara, 180.

CHAPTER 5

AFTER MCCONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how the role of the head of the IC fared since DCI McCone left office. The first area covered is the how the DCI's position has diminished between the tenures of John McCone and George Tenet. The second part of this chapter examines the challenges faced by DCI Tenet in the lead up to the Iraq War and how this situation did or did not relate to the problems of DCI McCone. In focusing on DCI Tenet, the areas covered for comparison were his background prior to assuming the position of DCI, how DCI Tenet took charge of the IC, how DCI Tenet fared under the leadership styles of President William J. Clinton and George W. Bush, how the CIA's success in Afghanistan elevated his status with President Bush and how DCI Tenet undermined U.S. intelligence in the lead up to the Iraq War in 2003.

FROM DCI MCCONE TO DCI TENET

Between DCI McCone and DCI Tenet, eleven men served as DCI. Since the tenure of DCI McCone, most DCIs have refrained from the McCone model on policy involvement, staying within their mandate of providing intelligence to determine the feasibility of a debated policy. Once a policy was decided, the head of the IC has

refrained from offering a different prescription. While this is the ideal role for the DCI and the IC, it has been difficult at times.

Since the tenure of DCI McCone, the position of DCI has often succumbed to partisan politics. In 1967, Richard Helms became DCI. He was one of the few DCIs to hold his position across different administrations. DCI Helms served not only President Johnson but remained when Richard M. Nixon assumed the Presidency in 1969. In the early 1970's, William Colby (1973-1976) and George H. W. Bush (1976-1977) served as DCIs. When Jimmy Carter assumed the presidency in 1977, he made the DCI another political appointee, ousting then DCI Bush for Stanfield Turner simply because of a change in administration.²⁶⁵ Four years later, Ronald Reagan replaced DCI Turner with his own man, William Casey (1981-1987). Appointing DCI Casey established the precedent for selecting a new DCI at the beginning of a new administration.

In 1989, George H. W. Bush became President and attempted to revert back to the old model of keeping the previous DCI in place. He kept William Webster (1987-1991), a Reagan appointee in office. In 1991, President Bush appointed Robert Gates as DCI. DCI Gates remained in his position until removed by William J. Clinton. After assuming office, President Clinton appointed James Woolsey as DCI in 1993. Under President Clinton the position of DCI further declined. In the two years DCI Woolsey served as DCI, he only met President Clinton twice, "an all time low in the agency's annals."²⁶⁶ With little access to the President, DCI Woolsey became an ineffective head of the IC.

Adding to the problems faced by the IC in the Clinton Administration was the fallout from the Aldrich Ames espionage case. Morale at the CIA plummeted under DCI

²⁶⁵ Christopher Andrew, 427.

²⁶⁶ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 440.

Woolsey. At the end of 1994, DCI Woolsey resigned. It took the Clinton Administration almost three months to find a replacement.²⁶⁷ In 1995, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch finally agreed to become DCI. DCI Deutch served until 1997. In 1997, after failing to get Anthony Lake²⁶⁸ approved as DCI, President Clinton nominated George Tenet for the position of DCI. DCI Tenet served until 2004, the second longest tenure as head of the IC.²⁶⁹

BACKGROUND ON GEORGE TENET

DCI Tenet's Background

DCI Tenet's background in intelligence is markedly different from DCI McCone. While DCI McCone had little to no experience in intelligence before taking charge of the IC, DCI Tenet was well versed in intelligence-related matters. Prior to becoming DCI, Tenet's history of public service, in one form or another, was intelligence focused. From the late 1980's to 1993, DCI Tenet served as the staff director for the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI).

In 1993, with the beginning of the Clinton Administration, DCI Tenet transferred to the National Security Council staff. From 1993 until 1995, DCI Tenet was the staff officer in charge of intelligence.²⁷⁰ In 1995, DCI Tenet was appointed by President

²⁶⁷ Tim Weiner, 454-455.

²⁶⁸ Anthony Lake served as President Clinton's National Security Advisor from 1993 to 1997.

²⁶⁹ Douglas Garthoff, *Directors of Central Intelligence as Leaders of the U.S. Intelligence Community, 1946-2005*, (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc, 2007.), 276. When he resigned, DCI Tenet surpassed DCI Helms. The only person to be DCI the longest was Allen Dulles.

²⁷⁰ Douglas Garthoff, 257.

Clinton to the position of Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DDCI), under DCI Deutch. When DCI Deutch left in December 1996, Tenet became the Acting Director. On July 11, 1997, President Clinton appointed George Tenet as DCI, after the failure of the Anthony Lake nomination.²⁷¹

Taking Charge of the IC and Policymaking Role

Taking Charge. Like DCI McCone, DCI Tenet had to rebuild the morale of the CIA. In the case of DCI McCone it was the fallout from the Bay of Pigs. For DCI Tenet it was the neglect of intelligence issues by the Clinton Administration during its first term. DCI Woolsey had no access to President Clinton and left after less than two years in the job. DCI Deutch served after no one else wanted the job, leaving after only two years. From 1993 to 1997, President Clinton had three DCIs. With little continuity at the top, the position of the IC steadily eroded. As a result of the end of the Cold War, the IC's budget declined under the Clinton Administration. DCI Tenet described the situation, "the entire [IC], not just the CIA, lost billions of dollars in funding,"²⁷² Along with a loss of funding, the IC workforce was cut by 25 percent.²⁷³ These problems added up to serious morale problems in the IC.

DCI Tenet's first task was to reestablish morale and assert his authority over the IC. He pushed the Clinton Administration to approve an increase in the intelligence budget. DCI Tenet pushed for an additional two billion dollars per year for the next five

²⁷¹ Douglas Garthoff, 257.

²⁷² George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm, My Years at the CIA*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 14.

²⁷³ George Tenet, 14.

years (1997- 2002).²⁷⁴ When he did not receive support from the Clinton Administration, he went directly to Congress for additional funding.²⁷⁵ More money for the IC was not enough to rebuild morale, DCI Tenet also worked to strengthen the missions of the CIA.

When DCI McCone came into office he concentrated his effort on expanding the analytical aspect of the CIA. DCI Tenet focused his effort on rebuilding the clandestine element of the CIA. To DCI Tenet, the most important aspect of the CIA's mission was espionage and "stealing secrets."²⁷⁶ Under DCI Tenet's tenure, CIA increased the number of stations throughout the world by 30 percent.²⁷⁷ With his focus on the clandestine side of the CIA's mission, he neglected CIA's analytical capacity. While focusing on clandestine operations proved a success in Afghanistan, the neglect of the analytical aspects of the CIA proved disastrous during the 2002-2003 Iraq War debate.

One major area of difference between DCI McCone and DCI Tenet was their view of the role they played as head the IC. DCI McCone viewed his mission as head of the IC first and head of CIA second. DCI Tenet took the opposite approach. DCI Tenet viewed his leadership of CIA as more important than being head of the IC. DCI Tenet "believed first and foremost that it was essential to rebuild the director's base, CIA."²⁷⁸ Once he had rebuilt the CIA, he believed he could concentrate on repairing the morale in the IC. DCI Tenet failed to provide proper oversight for the IC as he concentrated his

²⁷⁴ George Tenet, 21.

²⁷⁵ George Tenet, 21.

²⁷⁶ George Tenet, 22.

²⁷⁷ George Tenet, 22.

²⁷⁸ George Tenet, 27.

efforts solely on the CIA. Without proper oversight, the IC entered the Iraq War debate in a weakened position.

Policymaking Role. Unlike DCI McCone, DCI Tenet had a clear view of his role in policymaking. While DCI McCone actively engaged in the policy process, DCI Tenet understood policymaking was not the purview of the intelligence professional. According to DCI Tenet, the IC doesn't "make policy; [the IC] implements it."²⁷⁹ Even with this attitude, DCI Tenet, on occasion, was drawn into the policy debate.

Under the Clinton Administration, DCI Tenet had a major policymaking role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. DCI Tenet was responsible for working out the security arrangements between the Israelis and Palestinians. His work began in 1996 while he was the Deputy Director under DCI Deutch and carried over into his directorship. To justify his new role, DCI Tenet saw it less as policymaking and more as being an "honest broker."²⁸⁰ DCI Tenet allowed the two parties to negotiate directly with each other and attempted to minimize his own role. According to DCI Tenet, the less involved he was the better it was for all the parties.²⁸¹ Even with this view, DCI Tenet also understood the need for his involvement. According to DCI Tenet, the CIA was the one "entity both sides could trust."²⁸² He served in this function as a policymaker until the Bush Administration came into office. According to DCI Tenet, the Bush Administration did

²⁷⁹ George Tenet, 55.

²⁸⁰ George Tenet, 55.

²⁸¹ George Tenet, 55.

²⁸² George Tenet, 64.

not want the head of the IC involved in policymaking.²⁸³ Under the Bush Administration, DCI Tenet's role centered on intelligence-related matters, not policymaking.

Working Under Two Presidents

DCI Tenet served two different presidents. Like DCI McCone, DCI Tenet had to adjust to the challenges of two different styles of leadership. Each president, in turn, had a different vision for DCI Tenet's involvement with policy matters.

President Clinton's Leadership Style. When Clinton assumed office in 1993 he had little to no understanding of the role of intelligence. The IC's influence during President Clinton's first term steadily eroded. When DCI Tenet assumed office, he had to repair the strained relationship between the President and the IC. In the Clinton Administration, the DCI was granted cabinet level access, a precondition for DCI Deutch accepting the job.²⁸⁴ Even with cabinet level status, his access to President Clinton was sporadic.²⁸⁵

President Clinton did have confidence in DCI Tenet's leadership. On two occasions, President Clinton backed up DCI Tenet in policy disputes. The first occurred in 1996 during the Wye River Summit between Benjamin Netanyahu²⁸⁶ and Yasser

²⁸³ George Tenet, 80.

²⁸⁴ George Tenet, 136.

²⁸⁵ George Tenet, 136.

²⁸⁶ Benjamin Netanyahu was Prime Minister of Israel from 1996 to 1999.

Arafat.²⁸⁷ As part of the discussions, the Israelis demanded the release of Jonathan Pollard,²⁸⁸ in exchange for the Israelis accepting any negotiated settlement with the Palestinians. DCI Tenet and the IC adamantly opposed his release. According to DCI Tenet, being actively engaged in the security negotiations and allowing the release of Pollard would have undermined his authority as head of the IC.²⁸⁹ Any release of Pollard would have implied that DCI Tenet approved the release. DCI Tenet took his case directly to President Clinton and threatened to resign if Pollard was released.²⁹⁰ In the end, President Clinton supported the position of DCI Tenet, despite increased pressure from the Israelis.

The second occasion where President Clinton supported DCI Tenet was during the Kosovo Air Campaign in 1999. During the air campaign, U.S. aircraft accidentally bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia. The U.S. military used data provided by the CIA for striking targets in Belgrade. According to DCI Tenet, pressure mounted on the White House to find a scapegoat, and DCI Tenet “seemed the likely candidate.”²⁹¹ In the end, President Clinton pushed back and kept DCI Tenet in office.

President Bush’s Leadership Style. When George W. Bush assumed the Presidency, the access changed. While he lost his cabinet level rank, his access to the

²⁸⁷ Yasser Arafat was head of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank from 1994 until his death in 2004.

²⁸⁸ Jonathan Pollard spied for Israel against the United States in the late 1980’s. At the time of the Wye River Summit, Mr. Pollard was incarcerated for espionage against the United States. He is still in prison.

²⁸⁹ George Tenet, 67.

²⁹⁰ George Tenet, 68.

²⁹¹ George Tenet, 48.

President increased dramatically.²⁹² As DCI McCone recognized the importance of his access to the President, so too did DCI Tenet. According to DCI Tenet, “being in regular, direct contact with the president is an incredible boon to a CIA director’s ability to do his job.”²⁹³ DCI Tenet met with President Bush on a daily basis during his time as DCI, often participating in the daily intelligence update to the President.

Over time this level of access became a detriment to DCI Tenet. While Tenet wanted to be an important member of the Bush Administration, and “please his superiors,”²⁹⁴ that closeness to President Bush, in the end, caused him to lose his effectiveness as a leader of the IC. During the policy debates in the Bush Administration on the Iraq War, DCI Tenet sided with policymakers over his intelligence professionals.

DCI TENET AND OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. moved to strike at Al Qaida sanctuary bases in Afghanistan. It was the CIA operations in Afghanistan that raised the stature of DCI Tenet with President Bush. The basis for the CIA’s success in Afghanistan was the groundwork done prior to September 11.

Despite the lack of interest policy makers showed to Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, the CIA remained active in the area, working to increase its network of HUMINT sources. In fact, on September 10, 2001, the CIA had more than one hundred sources and subsources operating throughout the country. From this network of sources, the CIA was able to build a winning

²⁹² George Tenet, 136.

²⁹³ George Tenet, 137.

²⁹⁴ Tim Wiener, 487.

strategy to defeat Al Qaida.²⁹⁵

The actions of the CIA showcased the success of DCI Tenet's focus of rebuilding the clandestine service in the 1990's.

On September 17, 2001, President Bush directed the use of lethal operations against the Al Qaida network and their sponsors, the Taliban, in Afghanistan. While the Defense Department under Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was unable to move military forces fast enough to the region, the CIA filled in the void. Within days of the presidential order, CIA paramilitary teams were on the ground fighting alongside the Northern Alliance.²⁹⁶ The speed of CIA operations contrasted with the slowness of the Defense Department brought friction between Secretary Rumsfeld and DCI Tenet.

DCI Tenet downplayed any friction with Secretary Rumsfeld.²⁹⁷ In the initial stages of the operation in Afghanistan, the CIA was the lead agency, with the Defense Department in a supporting role. It was not until mid October 2002 that U.S. Special forces began to operate on the ground in Afghanistan. At this point, Secretary Rumsfeld asserted his position to be the sole person in charge of operations in Afghanistan. DCI Tenet took the opposite view on the need to place CIA paramilitary teams under the authority the Defense Department. DCI Tenet argued that the if the teams "fell under Pentagon control, the big bureaucracy would stifle [CIA] initiative and prevent [the CIA]

²⁹⁵ John Gazzelli, Chapter review of Henry A. Crumpton, "Intelligence and War: Afghanistan, 2001-2002," in *Transforming U.S. Intelligence* ed. Jennifer E. Sims and Burton Gerber, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2005, for MSI 611-10, *Intelligence and National Security Policy* for National Defense Intelligence College on January 6, 2008.

²⁹⁶ The Northern Alliance was a collection of various Afghani groups that fought against the Taliban.

²⁹⁷ George Tenet, 208.

from doing the job....”²⁹⁸

The friction between the CIA and Defense Department on the operational side carried over to the analytical side. On October 25, 2001, Secretary Rumsfeld directed the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to prepare an analysis claiming that the Northern Alliance would not defeat the Taliban “before winter.”²⁹⁹ DCI Tenet disputed the findings of DIA, claiming that the CIA and Northern Alliance were making progress towards defeating the Taliban.³⁰⁰ On November 9, 2001, Defense officials briefed that operations around the city of Mazar-i-Shairf, Afghanistan, were “not going well.”³⁰¹ DCI Tenet again contradicted this assessment. Supporting DCI Tenet were the views of Hank Crumpton, the CIA’s lead operations officer for Afghanistan. Mr. Crumpton claimed that the Mazar-i-Sharif would fall with the next “twenty-four to forty-eight hours.”³⁰² As DCI Tenet explained the scene, “not everyone in the room agreed with Hank’s analysis.”³⁰³ In the end, DCI Tenet proved correct with Mazar-i-Sharif falling the next day.

By the end of December 2001, Al Qaida and its Taliban allies were routed from Afghanistan, forced to flee across the border into Pakistan. DCI Tenet and the CIA rose in stature. DCI Tenet was able, under short notice, implement President Bush’s directive to attack Al Qaida after September 11, 2001. DCI Tenet’s confidence in the CIA also

²⁹⁸ George Tenet, 216.

²⁹⁹ George Tenet, 217.

³⁰⁰ George Tenet, 217.

³⁰¹ George Tenet, 217.

³⁰² George Tenet, 217.

³⁰³ George Tenet, 217.

rose. While the clandestine service preformed successfully, the analytical side, neglected by DCI Tenet, would stumble during the Iraq War debate.

DCI TENT AND IRAQ WAR POLICY IN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

Undermining U.S. Intelligence for the Iraq War

The Iraq War presented a unique challenge to U.S. Intelligence as the Vietnam War did in the 1960's. In the Vietnam War, persistent negative assessments by the IC resulted in policymakers ignoring the intelligence. In the case of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) stockpiles, the IC, on a consistent basis, provided supporting information that bolstered the case for war against Iraq. Added to this were DCI Tenet's actions. In several instances during the debate, DCI Tenet sided with policymakers against intelligence professionals. As DCI McCone undermined the IC by getting them to side with him against policymakers, DCI Tenet undermined the IC by the opposite effect.

The Iraq WMD Debate. After Operation DESERT STORM, Saddam Hussein and Iraq remained a major foreign policy problem for the U.S. During the 1990's, the U.S. adopted a policy of isolating Iraq through United Nations sanctions. The threat posed by Saddam to his neighbors required the U.S. to maintain a military presence in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, and subsequent operations in Afghanistan in 2002, the Bush Administration relooked the threat posed by

Saddam. In arguing the case for war, the Bush Administration used the threat of Iraq's WMD stockpile as a justification for invasion.

Intelligence during this time supported the case for war. Throughout the 1990's the IC concluded that Iraq had a WMD stockpile. Unable to find evidence to contradict their analytical conclusions, the IC remained steadfast in their assessment on Iraq's WMD capabilities. DCI Tenet was at the center of this debate on Iraq. While DCI Tenet refrained from being an advocate for a particular policy such as in the case of DCI McCone, DCI Tenet did provide intelligence that only served to reinforce the preconceived policy that Saddam Hussein was an imminent threat to the United States.

In justifying the war, the Bush Administration focused its case on Iraq's WMD threat. Using already established intelligence, the administration made concrete allegations against Saddam. The most vocal advocate for war was Vice President Richard Cheney. Vice President Cheney presented a case for war to policymakers by "overstat[ing] the intelligence," available.³⁰⁴ At times this presented a challenge to DCI Tenet. In August 2002, Vice President Cheney made an emphatic statement, in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that Iraq had WMD.³⁰⁵ Vice President Cheney's statement was never cleared with CIA. As DCI Tenet remarked, the statement "went well beyond what our analysis could support."³⁰⁶ However, in his desire to remain influential in the Bush Administration, he never challenged Cheney's remarks. While he shied away from correcting policymakers, he was not shy in challenging intelligence professionals if they contradicted policymakers.

³⁰⁴ George Tenet, 315.

³⁰⁵ George Tenet, 315.

³⁰⁶ George Tenet, 315.

In October 2002, statements made by President Bush and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DDCI) John McLaughlin appeared to contradict each other on Iraq's imminent threat. On October 2, 2002, DDCI McLaughlin testified before the SSCI, in closed session, that the threat of an attack by Saddam was low.³⁰⁷ On October 7, 2002, in a major address to the nation, President Bush argued that Iraq was an immediate threat to the U.S. When DDCI McLaughlin's statements were released to the public, the two statements did not reconcile with one another. On orders from the White House, DCI Tenet gave a public statement that refuted the contention of DDCI McLaughlin.³⁰⁸ DCI Tenet sided with policymakers in this dispute, undermining his second in command.

In the Fall of 2002, while the Congress was debating the authorization for the use of force against Iraq, the IC was asked to provide a NIE on the state of Iraq's WMD. Like NIE 53-63, the October 2002 Iraq NIE, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program*, was extremely important to policymakers. The Iraq NIE presented the case to policymakers that Iraq did possess WMD. The NIE's key judgments were emphatic on Iraq's WMD program. The NIE concluded that:

Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions; if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade.³⁰⁹

The certitude of the key judgments confirmed "everything the White House was

³⁰⁷ George Tenet, 335.

³⁰⁸ Tim Weiner, 486.

³⁰⁹ U.S. Director for Central Intelligence, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program*, National Intelligence Council (Washington D.C., 2003), 1.

saying”³¹⁰ on Iraq. Based on the findings in the NIE, Congress authorized the President to use force against Iraq. As in the case of NIE 53-63, the failure to find Iraq’s WMD proved the key judgments to have “been stunningly wrong.”³¹¹ Like in the Vietnam War, the confidence in national intelligence by policymakers was lost during the Iraq War.

DCI Tenet’s early failure to concentrate on the analytical aspect of the CIA contributed to undermining the intelligence effort. DCI Tenet never pushed for the IC to produce a quality product on Iraq’s WMD program. While a normal NIE takes about six months to complete, the Iraq NIE was completed in three weeks. DCI Tenet admitted, in his memoirs, that he did not think a NIE “was necessary.”³¹² With a condensed timeline, the quality of the work was poor. CIA incorporated information from various documents and assembled them into the NIE.³¹³ As one author described the NIE, the CIA had “produced the worst body of work in its long history.”³¹⁴ After reviewing all available data, the SSCI published its report on July 9, 2004 that took to task the IC for the poor quality of the NIE. Every judgment made in the NIE, the SSCI concluded, was not supported by information available to the IC. While the NIE damaged the IC and DCI Tenet’s reputation, his actions contributed to his fall.

After the fall of Saddam, the U.S. was unprepared for the chaos that ensued. Into that void an insurgency fueled by Al Qaida, Sunni, and Shiite militants emerged. Throughout the remainder of 2003 and into 2004, the U.S. struggled to contain the Iraqi

³¹⁰ Tim Weiner, 487.

³¹¹ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 52.

³¹² George Tenet, 322.

³¹³ George Tenet, 322.

³¹⁴ Tim Weiner, 487.

insurgency. Much like the Vietnam analysis, CIA analysis of post-Saddam Iraq was pessimistic. Even prior to the start of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, CIA assessed that the situation after initial combat operations would be difficult. As DCI Tenet explains, the CIA accurately predicted the outbreak of an insurgency within Iraq.³¹⁵ From an analysis done in January 2003, the CIA concluded that after the initial euphoria of the removal of Saddam, the Iraqis would turn against the U.S. occupation.³¹⁶ CIA continued to provide this same outlook throughout 2004. In response to these assessments, President Bush publically dismissed the findings. On September 22, 2004, President Bush claimed that analysts “were just guessing.”³¹⁷ President Bush’s rather dismissive statement illustrates the loss of confidence in U.S. intelligence.

DCI Tenet’s Fall.

For DCI Tenet, while the NIE incident was a disaster for the IC, his personal assurance to President Bush overstepped the bounds of solid analysis. On December 21, 2002, DDCI McLoughlin briefed President Bush on the CIA’s evidence for Iraq’s WMD Program. While the NIE made a definitive statement on the existence of WMDs, the brief to President Bush underwhelmed him. President Bush commented that the evidence was lacking. In his personal guarantee, DCI Tenet made the fatal comment “Slam Dunk,”³¹⁸ to the President. DCI Tenet, in his memoirs, attempted to explain away the comment, citing how this was made “ten months after the president saw the first

³¹⁵ George Tenet, 426.

³¹⁶ George Tenet, 424-425.

³¹⁷ The White House, “President Bush Meets with Prime Minister Allawi in New York Tuesday,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/09/20040921-9.html> (accessed May 28, 2008).

³¹⁸ George Tenet, 359.

workable war plan for Iraq,”³¹⁹ for instance. In reality, DCI Tenet provided the needed justification for going to war. In the words of White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, once DCI Tenet made his statement, it was “the confirmation,”³²⁰ policymakers needed. DCI Tenet staked his reputation as well as the reputation of the entire IC on the existence of Iraq’s WMD. With the head of the IC vouching for the intelligence, it was all the confirmation President Bush needed to invade Iraq.

DCI Tenet not only undermined intelligence in front of U.S. policymakers but also in the eyes of the world. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s flawed UN speech on Iraq’s WMD in February 2003 was based on intelligence provided by CIA. It was Secretary Powell’s mission to argue the case for action against Iraq to the UN. Over the course of several days in February 2003, Secretary Powell, DCI Tenet, and CIA analysts worked on the speech. At times they were in conflict with Vice President Cheney’s office. Aides within the Vice President’s office pushed to include material not substantiated by the CIA.³²¹ According to DCI Tenet, the goal “from beginning to end was to come up with rhetoric that was both supported by underlying intelligence and worthy of what we all hoped would be a defining moment.”³²² At the conclusion of these sessions, DCI Tenet believed they had “produced a solid product.”³²³ Secretary Powell delivered his speech to the UN with DCI Tenet sitting behind him. DCI Tenet’s presence demonstrated another facet in confirming all the assumptions made by the U.S. against

³¹⁹ George Tenet, 359.

³²⁰ Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*, (New York: Free Press, 2007), 186.

³²¹ George Tenet, 373.

³²² George Tenet, 373.

³²³ George Tenet, 374.

Iraq. In the end, the speech was flawed, with each assertion made undermined by facts on the ground. DCI Tenet succinctly summed up the results of the speech's failure, the "nation's credibility plummeted."³²⁴ While it damaged the U.S.'s credibility it also damaged DCI Tenet's credibility with other policymakers.

No WMD were found in Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003. DCI Tenet's position became tenuous within the administration. In order to divert attention away from the President and policymakers on the failure to find Iraq's WMD, the burden was placed on DCI Tenet and the IC. On several occasions, he was forced to shoulder the blame that could have been shared by other policymakers. The most striking example was the claim that Iraq sought uranium from Niger.³²⁵ President Bush made this accusation in his 2003 State of the Union address. In time this statement proved false. Instead of sharing the blame as the National Security Council was responsible for coordinating the draft of the speech prior to its delivery, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice shifted the blame to DCI Tenet. In placing the blame on DCI Tenet, Rice was able to undermine his position within the White House. As DCI Tenet relays "when reporters start asking if the president still has confidence in you, you know you are in trouble."³²⁶ Marginalized within the administration, DCI Tenet resigned in July 2004. He was the second to last person to hold the position of DCI. Peter Goss, former chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, became DCI in 2004. He lasted in the position until 2006 when the position of DNI was established.

³²⁴ George Tenet, 374.

³²⁵ Tim Weiner, 490.

³²⁶ George Tenet, 464.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter reexamines the research question and hypothesis posed at the beginning of the thesis. Next, this chapter answers the key questions used to focus the research question. Based on key findings, this chapter then presents several recommendations on ensuring the effectiveness of the DNI in light of the lessons learned from DCI McCone's tenure. Finally, this chapter examines potential future research in the understanding of leadership.

HYPOTHESIS AND KEY QUESTIONS

Hypothesis Examined

This thesis looked at the role the head of the IC needs to play in the development of American foreign policy. The head of the IC can either be a policy advocate or policy neutral. In determining his proper role a delicate balance is needed. When examining the tenure of John McCone as DCI, he overstepped his role as an intelligence leader and inserted himself too deeply in policy formulation.

In examining his role during the time period of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, DCI McCone's role expanded from initially focusing on intelligence

matters and how they relate to policy to advocating, forcefully, a policy that was at odds with other policymakers and the President. As the hypothesis addressed, as a policy advocate, DCI John McCone lost his ability to be an effective leader of the Intelligence Community during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

Key Question Examination

To further examine the validity of this hypotheses the following key questions were asked and examined:

1. Did DCI McCone undermine the IC by providing his own analysis or pressuring analysts to change theirs?

Yes. DCI McCone, several times during his tenure, relied on his own analysis in discussions with policymakers. Often that analysis was at odds with his analysts. As in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone saw the intelligence in terms he understood. Throughout the summer and fall 1962, DCI McCone and analysts in the IC presented two different interpretations of the same intelligence to policymakers. In arguing his case, DCI McCone undermined the analysis of the IC. From a policymaker's perspective, if the head of the IC questions the analysis of the IC why should the policymaker believe the analysis. In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, although DCI McCone alone assessed, correctly, the Soviet threat, he did long-term damage to the IC's credibility. The PFIAB's report severely criticized the method of analysis made by the IC, which DCI McCone never disputed, but reminding the President he was correct in his assessment. In being proven right with respect to Soviet intentions, DCI McCone

diminished the confidence in the analysis of the IC by senior members of the Kennedy Administration. Undermining his analysts in the eyes of policymakers had a detrimental consequence as the IC continued to provide negative assessments of selected policies with regards to Vietnam. DCI McCone's attempt to reconcile the difference between the analyst and the policymakers was met with disastrous results in early 1963.

DCI McCone's order to rewrite NIE 53-63 attempted to reconcile the difference in opinion between analysts and policymakers. Overreacting to accusations that the CIA provided poor analysis to policymakers during the Cuban Missile Crisis, DCI McCone forced his analysts to accept the views of policymakers. In denying the ability of analysts to provide unbiased reporting, DCI McCone exposed the CIA to a case of politicization of the intelligence. By allowing policymakers to determine what was going to be placed in the NIE, DCI McCone lost his creditability when the situation in South Vietnam invalidated the key findings of NIE 53-63. In the end, DCI McCone had to authorize the publication of a subsequent SNIE to correct the mistakes in NIE 53-63.

2. Did DCI McCone attempt to sway intelligence analysis to support his position if at odds with accepted policy?

Yes. DCI McCone in his final days pushed the IC to support him in his debates with other policymakers about the course to follow in Vietnam. By 1965, DCI McCone was a strong advocate of his position of a large air campaign against North Vietnam. At the same time he constantly critiqued the policy advocated by President Johnson and Secretary McNamara. While policymakers requested the IC examine the possible outcomes of the President's policy, DCI McCone also directed the IC to determine

potential endstates following his policy. Presenting IC analysis to policymakers that supported his position on an intensified air campaign against North Vietnam undermined the objectivity of the IC. With policymakers already ignoring DCI McCone's recommendations and seeing the IC analysis skewed towards the DCI position only served to isolate the IC from policymakers.

3. Was his position undermined by other policymakers within the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson?

Yes. DCI McCone was clearly an outsider in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. On occasions his views of the Cold War and the role the United States should play were at odds with other policymakers. DCI McCone's interaction with these policymakers was the basis for the strained relations.

His poor relations with National Security Advisor Bundy and Secretary of Defense McNamara furthered his isolation. As part of the National Security Council, DCI McCone's actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis undermined himself with Bundy, who did not like to be reminded that he was wrong on Cuba. Alienating Bundy resulted in DCI McCone losing a potential ally within the White House that could advocate for his position.

As DCI McCone's influence fell, Secretary McNamara's influence rose. By 1965, Secretary McNamara became the dominant policy adviser in the Johnson Administration, controlling Vietnam policy. While DCI McCone maintained a position close to Secretary McNamara, he did have a measure of success in the policy; however,

once he moved away from Secretary McNamara, DCI McCone had no allies in the White House to provide any level of support for his position.

4. Was his relationship with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson undermined by his own actions?

Yes. In working for two Presidents as head of the IC, DCI McCone clearly enjoyed the working relationship he had with President Kennedy as opposed to the working relationship he had with President Johnson. The access he had with President Kennedy, who appreciated what the IC provided, allowed DCI McCone to maintain some level of influence. In the transition to President Johnson, DCI McCone tried to replicate the interaction he had with President Kennedy. While at first President Johnson may have wanted a good working relation with his head of the IC, DCI McCone's over aggressive approach alienated him.

DCI McCone assumed that President Johnson welcomed his opinion until it was too late. Once President Johnson disregarded DCI McCone's policy advice it also marginalized the IC. Without listening to the judgments of the IC, President Johnson committed himself along a path that the IC continuously advised would lead to, at best a stalemate, and at worse defeat for the United States.

KEY FINDINGS

Introduction

DCI McCone started his tenure as head of the IC in a strong position. He successfully positioned himself to be a leader of the IC and not just a manager. In doing so, he forcefully advocated his position to policymakers. Paradoxically this advocacy weakened him within the administrations he served. There are several factors that contributed to DCI McCone losing influence within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. DCI McCone diminished influence had a cascading effect throughout the IC.

Key Findings

1. Being a policy advocate only served to marginalize DCI McCone within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. The implication of the head of the IC being marginalized is that it will also marginalize the IC. Timely and, as in the case of Vietnam, accurate analysis provided by the IC will be discarded by policymakers. Ignoring the IC, policymakers will use their own assessment to determine the potential outcomes of an approved policy. In this event, policymakers will adjust their analysis to ensure the policy will succeed.
2. DCI McCone's failure to work effectively with other members of the National Security Council isolated him within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Each organization within the national security apparatus wants to ensure they are providing the

best advice and analysis to support a given policy. In the end the collective judgment outweighs the individual's. The head of the IC is in a delicate position as he/she is in competition for the President's ear from other policymakers. With no advocates supporting his/her position within the national security structure, the views of the head of the IC can be either ignored or twisted in a way to show that he/she is in opposition to approved policy.

3. The head of the IC's position was weakened once the DCI became another political appointee. Serving at the pleasure of the President is difficult if your analysis shows the President's policy will fail. In order to maintain influence with the President, the head of the IC may be forced to amend or suppress dissenting assessments from the IC. By presenting to policymakers what they want to hear, intelligence assessments become worthless and only serve to parrot the approved policy.

4. DCI McCone undermined the IC's analysis with policymakers either by offering his own contradictory analysis or forcing the IC to change its analytical conclusions. The head of the IC is in a delicate position when offering his/her own analysis to the President. If not in concurrence with the assessments of the IC, the DCI's separate conclusions only serves to undermine the IC. The President may just rely on the assessment of the head of the IC instead of the assessment of the entire IC. In those events the IC becomes neutered, unable to exert any influence in developing the "right" policies. If the analysis of the head of the IC proves wrong, the President not only may ignore the head of the IC but also the analysis of the IC as well.

5. Leadership is a trait that needs to be taught within the IC. Intelligence professionals have an aversion to assuming a leadership role. The head of the IC is only effective when he/she can marshal the entire resources of the IC behind him/her. Backing up the head of the IC is the measured, unbiased analysis of the IC. A strong leader can use these assets to present to policymakers the potential outcomes of a policy. A strong leader can work across the national security apparatus and build an effective working relationships with key figures. A strong leader can also assert himself/herself into policy debates without overreaching as in the case of DCI McCone. Finally, a strong leader can stand up for the IC against dissenting opinions of policymakers, unlike in the case of DCI Tenet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

DCI McCone's role in policy development presents a case of overreaching. DCI McCone's actions only served to alienate him and undermine the IC. Studying the case of DCI McCone will give intelligence professionals and future leaders an understanding that the role of intelligence in policymaking is a difficult one. Human nature will almost certainly force an individual to interject his or her views into a policy debate if they question the policy being implemented. This puts intelligence professionals in a delicate position. Intelligence professionals need to find the right balance between advocacy and neutrality. Intelligence professionals can and will be undermined if they take their role to

either extreme. To guard against that situation, the IC needs to strengthen its position in the policymaking process. The DNI must be the one to do this first. The DNI must work to get the business of intelligence above partisan politics. The strengthened position of the DNI will enhance the ability of the IC to provide unbiased analysis on policy and be accepted by policymakers.

1. Establish a fixed term for the DNI.

The weakened position of the head of the IC began in the 1970's when President Carter failed to follow precedent and keep the incumbent DCI in office. Tying a DCI to a new administration only serves to make the position a political reward. Serving the interest of the current administration does not, necessarily, serve the interest of the nation. Intelligence and the support it provides to policy is a long-term process. Linking the DNI to an administration forces the IC to focus on short-term needs to the neglect of long-term interests. As an example, DNI Mitch McConnell's efforts to integrate the IC's networks prior to the conclusion of the Bush Administration are being rushed. The underlining assumption is the hope that the next administration will accept what has been accomplished and carry on with integration as its goal. If the DNI had a fixed term then rushing through projects will end. The DNI can take a long-term view in the interests of the community and nation.

Establishing a fixed term for presidential appointees is not out of the norm. For instance, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, who manages the U.S. economy, serves a fixed term of four years, with the potential for successive reappointments. In the national security structure two key positions have fixed terms. The Director of the Federal Bureau

of Investigation serves a fixed term of ten years with no ability for reappointment. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff serves a fixed term of two years, with the opportunity for one additional reappointment. Making the position of DNI a fixed term will produce several positive effects.

The length of the DNI's term must be sufficiently long enough to allow for the DNI to concentrate on the needs of the IC, but not too long where his/her analysis becomes stale. The ideal length should be five years. Not only will the DNI serve a two-term President well, it also allows for a smooth transition to a new administration. First, it allows for the DNI to crossover between administrations maintaining a level of continuity in the national security apparatus. Second, the length also gives the new President the opportunity to establish intelligence goals and receive advice from a seasoned DNI in a deliberate manner. Third, it also gives the new President time to either reappoint the current DNI or seek a new DNI. The DNI should be limited to only one reappointment. In the case of DCI McCone, he served almost five years. In that time he was able to establish his authority over the IC.

2. Support unbiased IC analysis.

The dilemma faced by an intelligence professional can be summed up in the following scenario. After going through levels of vetting in the IC's bureaucracy, the DNI presents an analyst's key conclusions to the President or a senior policymaker. However, in offering the analysis, the DNI claims not to believe it and proceeds to offer his own analysis. The IC's credibility is lost to the policymaker. In the case of DCI

McCone, he used either the IC's analysis to back up his policy recommendations or provide his own analysis if he did not agree with the analytical conclusions.

The McCone and Tenet cases show how each DCI undermined the IC, causing long-term damage to the credibility of the IC. During DCI McCone's tenure, he undercut the IC's analysis. During the Cuban Missile Crisis he offered his own competing analysis to policymakers. During the Vietnam War, DCI McCone undercut the IC by insisting that NIE 53-63 reflect the views of the policymakers instead of the views of the analysts. The end result was a flawed NIE where the key judgments were invalidated within a month of its release in April 1963. Even the Iraq NIE exposed DCI Tenet to undermining IC analysis. His statements to President Bush about the certitude of Iraq's WMD, destroyed the credibility of the IC when no WMD was found.

A recent example shows how the head of the IC should support the IC's analysis. On December 3, 2007, the IC published the Iran NIE, entitled *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, on Iran's nuclear program. The NIE concluded that Iran had not restarted its nuclear program since 2003. At the time of its release, the Bush Administration had attempted to present a case of an impending threat posed by Iran. The NIE appeared to contradict the position of policymakers. DNI McConnell, instead of offering his own conclusion or force the analysts to side with policymakers, maintained his own impartiality. While policymakers complained, no one seriously questioned the NIE judgments because DNI McConnell was not pushing his own agenda on Iran. The credibility of the DNI and the IC are linked. A lose in credibility in one will result in the other losing its credibility.

3. Work to build effective relations with members of the National Security Council.

The DNI, in order to be effective, must work closely with two key figures in any administration: the National Security Advisor, who can be the key advocate for the DNI within the White House and the Secretary of Defense, whose view on foreign policy matters, especially in times of war, hold more sway over others. While no relationship is perfect, the need to educate these two on the importance of intelligence and its fundamental role in American foreign policy belongs to the DNI. DCI McCone failed to understand or appreciate the importance of these two individuals. DCI McCone seemed at times to believe he was more important than Bundy and a co-equal with Secretary McNamara.

The Defense Department's establishment of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence (USDI) is an excellent example of tying the needs of the DNI with the Secretary of Defense. The USDI not only serves the Secretary but he is also dual-hatted to serve the DNI. This position effectively links the two organizational leaders together. A similar model can be set up for the NSC. The National Security Advisor should establish a permanent position on the NSC specifically focused on intelligence matters. While the DNI serves the needs of the President, the intelligence advisor on the NSC staff can serve the needs of the National Security Advisor. The intelligence advisor on the NSC staff should serve in the same capacity as the USDI. First, this individual would be the principal assistant to the National Security Advisor answering intelligence-related

matters. As the principal assistant, the advisor can educate the National Security Advisor on the capabilities of the IC and relay information between the Advisor and the DNI. Second, with concurrence from the DNI, this individual would serve as the liaison between the NSC and the IC, filtering information to the proper agency. Third, from his position on the NSC staff, the intelligence advisor can relay pressing issues to the DNI that arises in NSC meetings that do not involve the principals.

4. Establish a Leadership Block of Instructions at the National Defense Intelligence College.

Leadership is an important quality that should be studied. Leadership is not the sole property of the operators. Courses on leadership are taught at the Service Academies as well as the Staff Colleges for each of the Services. While the focus of training leadership is on the combat officer, its function is just as important in the intelligence field. In some aspects, DCI McCone was effective because he considered himself a leader and not a manager. In the realm of intelligence, senior personnel consider themselves managers first, not leaders. There is a natural apprehension against striving to take the leadership mantle. Also, historically there is a structural problem in denying the head of the IC a leadership role. From 1947 until 2006, when the DCI headed the IC, the only real authority he had was over CIA. DCI's took two approaches to the rest of the community. In the case of DCI McCone, he attempted to lead it while DCI Tenet ignored the IC and focused on running CIA.

The National Defense Intelligence College (NDIC) should establish a curriculum focusing on leadership training, similar to the model used in the staff colleges. The U.S.

Army Command & General Staff Colleges curriculum on leadership starts with a foundation course, then examines leadership and organizations, finally it goes through several case studies on leadership. One course cannot cover the challenges faced by leaders in the IC today. The program needs to be a series of courses, extending across NDIC's academic year, much like the Denial & Deception (D&D) program.³²⁷ The courses should be geared towards the intelligence professional and future leaders of the IC.

The first course should lay the building block for the study of leadership. It should incorporate the concepts of critical thinking as well as give a historical overview of the IC in order to understand today's challenges faced by the IC. The second course should examine leaders and organizations. This course should cover the challenges IC leaders face in managing large and complex organizations. It should also look at how leaders interact with one another to establish effective communications across the IC and national security apparatus. The final course should be a series of case studies. This course should examine how individual heads of the IC managed their responsibilities and how they led the IC. This course should examine where they succeeded and where they met challenges. More importantly, these courses should serve as a guide post for future IC leaders.

³²⁷ The D&D program is a series of courses that span the entire academic year at NDIC. The four courses offered under the D&D program cover the entire spectrum of foreign denial and deception. At the conclusion of the program, students receive a certificate from the Foreign Denial and Deception Committee (FDDC).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Leadership is a key element for all intelligence professionals. However, the DNI is considered more of a manager for the IC than its leader. As an example, no one claims that the Secretary of Defense manages the Defense Department, he leads the Defense Department. Like the Secretary of Defense, the DNI heads a large diverse organization. Future studies should examine how the DNI can become a more effective leader of the IC.

In the coming years, future DNIs will continue to define their position. Each DNI will take a different approach to managing the IC and how they interact with policymakers. Each DNI will bring their strengths and weaknesses to the position. Since DCI McCone, there have been few appointments to the head of the IC that did not have some background in intelligence-related matters. One area to observe is the background of the DNI. A DNI who comes from a non-intelligence background may move towards the DCI McCone model of policy involvement. DNIs with intelligence-related background may become adverse to policy involvement.

For the future, researchers should examine how a DNI view his/her role in policy development. The DNI's background is a valid starting point to determine how a DNI will participate in policy discussions. Further research should examine whether the DNI takes an expansive view of his or her leadership of the IC. Some DNIs may attempt to maintain a narrow view, controlling those areas under his or her direct management, like in the case of DCI Tenet. For some DNIs, they may follow DCI McCone's method and attempt to assert their control over the entire IC.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined DCI McCone's role in policymaking during the Vietnam War era. DCI McCone, initially, saw his role in policymaking as policy neutral. However, his natural inclination was to become actively involved in policy debates. In the years he served as DCI, he forced his way into many of the policy discussions of the time. In some cases, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, he was somewhat successful. With Vietnam, his advice was ignored. He pushed the wrong policy prescription on policymakers. While he believed he was doing the right thing, his methods only served to marginalize him within the administrations he served. In today's complex geo-strategic environment, the DNI and the IC needs to determine its role in policy formulation. Finding the right balance will go a long way in ensuring that the DNI and the IC maintain its credibility with policymakers.

APPENDIX A

LETTER FROM DCI MCCONE TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON APRIL 28, 1965

Dear Mr. President:

I remain concerned, as I have said before to you, Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara, over the limited scale of air action against North Vietnam which we envision for the next few months.

Specifically I feel that we must conduct our bombing attacks in a manner that will begin to hurt North Vietnam badly enough to cause the Hanoi regime to seek a political way out through negotiation rather than expose their economy to increasingly serious levels of destruction. By limiting our attacks to targets like bridges, military installations and lines of communication, in effect we signal to the Communists that our determination to win is significantly modified by our fear of widening the war.

In these circumstances the Communists are likely to feel they can afford to accept a considerable amount of bomb damage while they improve their air defenses and step up their insurgency in South Vietnam. If they take this line of action, in the next few months they can present us with an ever-increasing guerrilla war against the reinforced Viet Cong in terrain and circumstances favorable to the Communists.

If this situation develops and lasts several months or more, I feel world opinion will turn against us, Communist propaganda will become increasingly effective, and indeed domestic support of our policy may erode.

I therefore urge that as we deploy additional troops, which I believe necessary, we concurrently hit the north harder and inflict greater damage. In my opinion, we should strike their petroleum supplies, electric power installations, and air defense installations (including the SAM sites which are now being built). I do not think we have to fear taking on the MIG's, which after all the ChiNats defeated in 1958 with F-86's and Sidewinders.

I am not talking about bombing centers of population or killing innocent people, though there will of course be some casualties. I am proposing to "tighten the tourniquet" on North Vietnam so as to make the Communists pause to weigh the losses they are taking against their prospects for gains. We should make it hard for the Viet Cong to win in the south and simultaneously hard for Hanoi to endure our attacks in the north.

I believe this course of action holds out the greatest promise we can hope for in our effort to attain our ultimate objective of finding a political solution to the Vietnam problem. This view follows logically, it seems to me, from our National Intelligence Estimate of 18 February 1965, which concludes that the Hanoi regime would be more likely than not to make an effort to "secure a respite" by some political move when and if, but not before, a

sustained U.S. program of air attacks is damaging important economic or military assets in North Vietnam.

Respectfully yours,

John A. McCone³²⁸

³²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, Vol II Vietnam January-June 1965*, "279. Letter From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Johnson," http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/271_285.html (accessed June 10, 2008).

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