

Interview with Daniel Ellsberg

with Kurt Jacobsen

Daniel Ellsberg is as good a candidate as any for the role of patron saint of whistle blowers. In the spring of 1971 Ellsberg and Rand Corporation colleague Anthony Russo smuggled out, photocopied, and released a 47-volume internal Defense Department review chronicling thirty years of systematic deception of the American public as to the real nature, motives, and depth of the Vietnam debacle. Nixon, who saw everything in conspiratorial terms, rapidly unraveled his own administration in the frantic course of harassing Ellsberg and anyone else who might inform the citizenry or Congress of anything the imperial president didn't want known or leaked. Nixon's infamous "plumbers" rifled the office files of Ellsberg's psychiatrist looking for dirt long before they exercised their imperfect burglary skills at the Watergate hotel. The White House tapes on the day of the publication of excerpts in the *New York Times* reveal an appalled chief aide H.R. Haldeman commiserating with Nixon about this heinous act, which ruined the "infallibility" of the president—a hitherto handy thing to wield. They were grieving over the grave of public gullibility which the Bush administration so ardently wants now to resurrect.

Ellsberg was born in Chicago in 1926. He attended Harvard where he earned a doctorate in economics. Not many hawkish intellectuals or politicians today can say that they started Marine Corps boot camp the day after defending their thesis. After three years of service he joined the think tank Rand Corporation in 1958 as a specialist studying ways of averting accidental nuclear war. In 1964 he became special aide to the Assistant Secretary of Defense, John McNaughton, whose brief included Southeast Asia. Ellsberg volunteered to go to Vietnam as a civilian State Department employee in 1966 and 1967 where he came to realize the futility of the intervention. And, he concluded, that the war was an immoral enterprise when he participated in the Pentagon Papers project, commissioned by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and read the whole uncensored history of indefensible decisions. The public, he decided, had a right to know too. After acquittal at his 1973 trial, when it came to light that the government tapped his lawyers' phones

Daniel Ellsberg

and tried to bribe the judge with an offer of the FBI directorship, Ellsberg went on to participate in anti-nuclear and anti-interventionist movements, accumulating a very long rap sheet.

This conversation took place by telephone in late September 2002 as Ellsberg was preparing for a book tour for his books *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and The Pentagon Papers* which were published in October. The book itself ranges well beyond the papers episode, including intriguing and unsparing, and often surprising portraits of many key figures. (For example, Ellsberg's account of super-spook Edward Lansdale—the model for the naively malevolent advisor in Graham Greene's classic *The Quiet American*—raises the piquant question whether Greene was taken in by the country boy pose Lansdale liked to strike.) Apart from the book, we talked a good deal about his disturbing sense of *deja vu* as he beholds George W. Bush.

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Q: Here is a book, *Secrets*, describing a bright, red-blooded, John Wayne-loving American shedding all the nice lies that he was taught to believe, but not all his ideas. A lot of Americans who grew up in the '60s especially can relate to that thorny experience.

Ellsberg: I grew up during the Second World War with the notion that we were fighting aggression. We were unquestionably the good guys, believing in the ideals in the Atlantic charter. At my trial in 1973 Howard Zinn quoted words from the Atlantic charter about self-determination and tears came to my eyes. I was crying at the thought of [what happened to] what we believed in. There was a kind of innocence then. That is what I thought we were fighting for.

We could have avoided Vietnam if we only had been true to that Wilsonian ideal of self-determination, which of course, Wilson ignored when Ho Chi Minh raised it in 1919 at Versailles. Certainly the British, or Churchill, never meant what they said about self-determination for British colonies. So FDR did not carry through on self-determination for French colonies, lest that be a bad precedent for British colonies. There we go back to 1945. But then I believed what our government was saying about the Soviet Union and became very anticommunist. The fallacy there was equating Stalin to Hitler

in the same way that Saddam is compared to Hitler by Cheney and Bush today.

Q: Why is it a fallacy?

Ellsberg: All these people—Stalin, Mao, Saddam—are quite comparable to Hitler in ruthlessness, and conceivably in megalomania. But Hitler was very different in his reckless military pursuit of his megalomania. Hitler could not be deterred and that it was not productive to negotiate with him. The equation that Stalin can't be contained either is the argument for preventive war. Still, our leaders did on the whole understand there was a difference from Hitler and that containment and deterrence was not only possible but preferable to preventive war. The military chiefs toyed with the idea of preventive war more than we knew.

Q: How secure are secrets? You say that the glib bromide that Washington can't keep significant secrets for long is wrong. Is this an Oliver Stone universe we are peeking into?

Ellsberg: Secrecy enabled governments to carry out neo-imperial and colonial policies without opposition. The American public thinks of itself as anti-imperial. Most Americans assent to this image of ourselves, to the proposition that we stand above all for freedom and independence everywhere. The idea that we placed high priority on democracy in underdeveloped countries—the plantations of the world, in effect, where what we wanted was natural resources or cheap labor—has always been a fraud. It was not just that we put up with dictatorship instead of communism. We chose dictatorship rather than liberal regimes or social democratic regimes or welfare regimes or anything that put any restraint on our economic control.

Q: A motivated researcher can find those sordid stories in their public library. What about secrets only the chosen few know?

Ellsberg: I'll give a very current example. Bush and Cheney rely on the image of Saddam as a brutal dictator, which he is. He conducted chemical warfare and can be counted on to do it again. They refer to its use against Iran but particularly against the Kurds, who allied with Iran in that area in 1988. Only secrecy enabled them to conceal the fact, until the [*New York*] *Times* revealed it a month ago—that Rumsfeld and others, while in Reagan's administration, were reopening diplomatic relations with Iraq in 1984–1985, supplying them with the chemical research for weapons, and covertly

giving them satellite coordinates and reconnaissance photos when we knew they were using this information to make chemical attacks. Those were, to all effect, American attacks, American-supported attacks.

Saddam was extremely ruthless. Our leaders covertly were just as ruthless. We continued to give trade credits to them—in some cases illegally—and to turn a blind eye to their nuclear program. What it illustrates is that our leaders by virtue of widespread discipline on secrecy have made allies of some of the worst dictators for reasons that have nothing whatever to do with anticommunism, and to do this very consistently in Guatemala, Iran, Indonesia, Vietnam, around the world.

Q: How do you sift personal interest from national interest when deciding what is worth keeping secret? Whose purpose does this secrecy serve?

Ellsberg: It's certainly not purposes they are willing to expose for open debate as to whether these are truly in the national interest. In terms of what they perceive as the American interests, and in terms of their sense of what means are allowed so long as they can be secret, our leaders don't yield anything to anyone in terms of ruthlessness. I'd like to believe that they couldn't get away with some of this stuff if it had been in the open.

Q: Another theme you bring up is that domestic democracy and an autocratic foreign policy cannot coexist.

Ellsberg: If you want to run a large part of the world, and these people do, they think it cannot be done without military means and threats that the public would reject in terms of dangers and values. If you want the empire, you have to protect these operations from democracy, and secrecy is the way you do it. Bush "junior" knows that he has got to make up reasons for this war. He's got to manipulate, got to deceive. His blatant reasons are not the real reasons. That was the case for Vietnam, and that is the case now.

Here are some questions I learned to ask from my experience. When was the Patriot Act, this several hundred page document, put together? Was it after September 11? I think it was a matter of waiting for the appropriate moment to be enacted. We've learned that they had every reason to expect major acts of terrorism from Osama bin Laden. I assume they did not know exactly when and exactly where. All we are told they did about it is to have John Ashcroft stay off commercial airlines, which is kind of a minimal reaction. I think they did more than that. They drafted the Patriot Act, and had in

writing the enabling legislation that they passed on September 14—a broad resolution passed by Congress to do whatever needed to be done, which the president tried to say was enough to authorize an invasion of Iraq, which is blatant but not more than Lyndon Johnson did.

The analogy to the Tonkin Gulf resolution is very close. I am sure there is planning right now for going further than the Patriot Act, and for exploiting the next terrorist act if there should be one. The president will make use of that to get an authorization out of Congress, a blank check as Johnson consciously did to use the Tonkin Gulf incidents, especially the second Gulf incident, to get the Tonkin Gulf resolution. They'll follow that analogy to the letter. My experience of the government leads me to assume that they are preparing themselves for that and with very positive expectations of pulling it off.

Q: Let me get the conspiracy question out of the way or on the table. What do you think of a recent French bestseller alleging that U.S. security agencies were behind the September 11 attacks? Could this conceivably be concealed? How much can these agencies pull off?

Ellsberg: That is a degree of competency that I don't really give them. I have to say I would be amazed if we have a government agency that is capable of doing that. There was an incident in the Vietnam War just before the election between Ky and Thieu in 1967. One helicopter supposedly misfired a rocket that went into a room in Cholon and knocked out six or seven of General Ky's major supporters in the port authority and dope trade. Every Vietnamese assumed the CIA had done it to destroy Ky as a rival to Thieu. I was still in Vietnam and gave no credence that the CIA could accomplish that, knowing precisely when those people would be there and hit them with one rocket. It didn't make sense with the level at which we operated. I just don't see us pulling off the collapse of the World Trade Center. But might we be capable of knowing that something like that is going to be done and letting it happen because we feel it would be useful to us? Possibly.

Q: You paired up in Vietnam over 1966-67 with John Paul Vann, the maverick soldier, whom Neil Sheehan used as a fascinating iconic figure in his Vietnam book, *A Bright Shining Lie*, made into an HBO movie not long ago. When did you come to disagree with Vann, who was killed in 1972?

Ellsberg: Where we did disagree on a major premise is that by 1968 or 1969 he continued to believe that it would be very damaging to our credibility if

we suffered defeat in Vietnam. He did not believe we could win, but he did believe we could keep going at much less cost by building up ARVN [forces] and so forth, and that it was worth doing. That's where I, more or less, was at up to 1965. Once we committed air power and ground troops there I went through about a year of believing we had to try very hard to make something out of this. By 1967 I no longer felt that the cost of this [intervention] in human lives was justified even by those objectives.

Q: How did Vann stack up against Sheehan's portrait?

Ellsberg: The book is a masterpiece in many ways. I admire it, especially his description of the early years. Sheehan was about twenty years younger and didn't know Vann very well. He started on the book after Vann died. Vann as a person did not come through. John was a very funny guy. From the book you might think he was a humorless fanatic. But he was a terrific companion, a very good friend, and very generous.

Remember, like Vann, I had a military background, three years, and some limited combat experience, and my idea of Vietnam initially had been shaped by that. I was not a pacifist. I believed in just wars, that the cause was just and the means proportionate—until it became clear to me that the thing got way out of control. Vann continued to believe in it because of the notion that the U.S. had to be a central pillar of world order. He was a cold warrior who had to serve in a just cause, justly conducted. You have to consider soldiers who don't want a war of aggression, a war against women and children.

Q: That's how we want to believe American soldiers behave, as if they're concerned with decency and justice.

Ellsberg: A lot of American soldiers are. I'm extremely critical of Bob Kerrey not just for what he did [in the Mekong Delta village slaughter in 1969] but for implying that was what all soldiers did. What Kerrey was part of at that time was an operation called "speedy express," which was part of the Phoenix Program. John was totally critical of the Phoenix Program. He recommended that these things be stopped, although there was not a chance. He saw no justification. He was against the use of air power and artillery and the "reconnaissance by fire"—ninety percent of it unjustified—that killed civilians.

Q: There did not seem to be such a solid rationale for going into Afghanistan either.

Ellsberg: My own view has changed a bit. My first impression was that Al Qaeda paid a kind of ransom or bribe to the Taliban to operate there. Peter Dale Scott showed me some evidence that the Taliban government was providing an operational base, and was collaborating very strongly. So that there was more of a rationale for attacking the Taliban than I perceived.

Q: So you approve of the Afghan military campaign?

Ellsberg: No, strictly speaking, I did not approve of it. In retrospect it was not necessarily the best thing to do but that there was a rationale for it that does not exist in the case of Iraq. I think the attack on Afghanistan, even though it was conducted more prudently and in a more limited way than I foresaw. I still say that the risks involved in doing that war were unjustified even though the risks were not entirely realized.

But an attack on Iraq is in great competition with the war against terrorism. It's close to abandoning the unified coalitional struggle against terrorism just as the war on Afghanistan amounted to abandoning the war on drugs; it led directly to a vast increase in opium production there. The war on drugs has been thrown overboard. Look at Columbia. That's another part of it. We are backing the major drug traffickers because they are going against the so-called revolutionary forces there. We are exacerbating the cocaine problem by our policies, not lessening it.

Q: Did you imagine that Afghanistan would become a new Vietnam?

Ellsberg: I was very worried. What little I did know suggested that at the time the administration intended to send a large number of troops to the occupation of Afghanistan. You have to give this administration credit for stopping short of that, and pretty much where the Russians ended up, in mainly occupying the cities. So Afghanistan did not turn out as badly as I thought it would.

Afghanistan was an exceptional case. There is very little scope for military action. What you need is a climate for cooperative measures among governments against terrorism. Both our Israeli policy in Palestine [sic] and this impending war against Iraq, separately and especially together, are likely to make it impossible for Arab states and Muslim states in Philippines and Indonesia and so forth to cooperate with us in the face of public outrage at what we're doing.

I thought the Gulf War would be more costly to the Americans because I expected that they would move on to Baghdad. Bush “senior” had turned against it with the advice of Powell. I give Powell credit and I do not agree that he should have gone on. So, what we are facing now is that the very people who believed it was a mistake then, including Cheney, are in power and proposing to correct what they see as [George W. Bush’s father’s] error, even cowardice, in having been bound by the UN and by the coalition objectives and by public opinion.

Q: Do you see a parallel here to your Vietnam era scenario of escalation going nuclear?

Ellsberg: The senior Bush kept that thread open a dozen years ago with the threat of nuclear weapons against chemical or biological attack. The very refusal to rule nuclear weapons out constituted a threat, and so constituted a use of the weapon. You use a weapon when you point it at somebody, whether you pull the trigger or not. Moreover, they feel that threat was effective and it encourages them to use it again. Bush “junior” absorbed that lesson and has shown a greater willingness to use the threat of nuclear weapons than we have seen since Nixon. Nixon did it covertly.

Q: This sounds like a throwback to the cheerful nuclear weapon theorizing of Herman Kahn—thinking about the unthinkable.

Ellsberg: Herman Kahn was a Rand Corporation consultant who wrote from the outside, but he was elaborating what the Secretary of State was doing with massive retaliation policies from 1953, which is relying on nuclear brinkmanship. Unfortunately, it led to a generation of Joint Chiefs who based a lot of planning on it. Now we’ve got a president who is a throwback to that era of openly threatening nuclear war. There is less public resistance than there would have been 15 years ago because of the ending of the Cold War. People no longer see that threat as leading to an all-out nuclear war with the Soviets. They’re a lot more tolerant.

Q: A point you stress in your book is that the highest policy circles knew very well what the consequences were of getting into Vietnam. We might assume that Bush “junior” knows all the negative aspects too. Is this *déjà vu* for you?

Ellsberg: I do have the feeling that our country is reliving the situation in 1964 and 1965. We have a president who is determined, for reasons of his own, in engaging in an aggressive war that the country as a whole does not

see as necessary. He will make every effort to manipulate Congress, the public, and UN opinion so as to get a minimal degree of support. He is moving toward renewed Tonkin Gulf resolution, a broad bank check, a delegation of power from both congress and the UN.

I never thought I would be feeling thankful to House Speaker Richard Arme. But I have to admit he is saying the right things: it will be unconstitutional, unwise and an aggressive war. These by the way, are phrases that were almost never used about Vietnam, except by Senator [Wayne] Morse. On the Democratic side there is scarcely more opposition than there was under Morse and Gruening. So I can't say I rely on Congress to save us, though it will be what I'll be trying to achieve by adding my voice to whatever else is happening. I expect to be using my book tour as much as possible for showing the analogy between then and now and trying to prevent another Tonkin Gulf resolution.

Q: One difference now if that Bush is behaving as if he can do what he likes with or without resolution.

Ellsberg: Nixon and Johnson believed they were entitled to do that, but Bush is more open about acting as an emperor than any president that I can remember. He pays less lip service to democracy or to constitutional constraints, let alone to the UN. Has he acknowledged even one international commitment that he likes or feels bound by? Yet, now with Iraq, Bush wants to revise basic principles of international order, which Chirac describes as desirable and as only a few rules, a few principles, a few laws.

Q: In tandem with a war on terrorism is an attack on the home front. It seems clear that the illegal activities the Nixon boys waged against you can be gotten away with today: breaking into your psychiatrist's office, wiretapping your lawyers, even arranging to have you assaulted.

Ellsberg: Surely. Bush is in the process of removing all those constraints. The things that were done against me I suspect are pretty much happening right now. It hasn't all been tested much, legally. He's maintaining the idea of secret courts, of detention without charges, without even releasing the names. We are moving in the direction of a police state now. I don't want to overstate how bad it is. We're not there yet. He's removed the freedoms he wants but it's mainly been against Middle Easterners and so made other people pretty passive about it. People are passive about it just as with AIDS,

which they thought only affected the gays, but it ain't gonna stop there. It can get great deal worse.

Q: Do you see any rays of light?

Ellsberg: There is much more leaking than anytime during the Vietnam War. A big difference from the Pentagon Papers time is that virtually all the military are opposed to this operation. There's a handful of civilians who think defeating Iraq will be as easy as deposing the Taliban or as cracking the Iraqi draftees in Kuwait. The military is not so confident and is worried about what he would do if attacked, and rightfully so. Perhaps now, as in 1991, Saddam would be deterred from using chemical and biological weapons. His ability to constrain himself, to be deterred, already has been tested in a way no other power ever has. No other power which possessed weapons of mass destruction, as he did, has been bombed for over six weeks and refrained from using those weapons. The idea that he would impulsively use those weapons when he is not being attacked is ridiculous.

Our military also is not counting on the Revolutionary Guard divisions to collapse in the way the divisions invading Iraq collapsed. And they are not counting on this being an easy pacification program, or occupation. So they are leaking in a way like nobody did at the time of Vietnam, and that a good sign. There should be more of it.

Q: Do you seen the "Vietnam Syndrome" operating today, by which I mean we don't jump into potential quagmires without clear and cogent objectives, wide public support, and an exit strategy?

Ellsberg: All that is operating, and there are some tones of one further thing that was part of the Vietnam Syndrome. The usual critical questions are: Can we succeed? What will the cost be? Is it really worthwhile? The question that was rarely raised at the time was: did we have a right to succeed?

One big difference today outside the administration, and which certainly is affecting our allies, is that this would be seen as clear-cut aggression in a way that Vietnam was not perceived by most people. As I describe in my book, I did not perceive it as an aggressive war either when I was at the Pentagon or was in Vietnam. It was reading the history that changed my thinking. Of course I already had felt we should get out, that the war was hopeless and so forth. But in 1969 I went beyond that by reading this history to see that the notion that this was a legitimate, though perhaps doomed, effort was wrong.

That we really were engaged in an aggressive war, a colonial war which was not justifiable in terms of our values.

Q: In *Secrets* you recall remarking to an American soldier in Vietnam, “do you ever feel like you are a redcoat?” and he says he does.

Ellsberg: Exactly. This is clearly looming as an aggressive war. People can see that. “Preemptive” is the word the military uses for action against an attack about to be launched. But what he is talking about is not imminent attack; it is a preventive war; it is about a speculative possibility. That is what the UN charter prevents. The question of aggression is being raised more now than during Vietnam. We were effectively confused by the bullshit put out by [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk and the generals.

Q: And the empire is always striking back.

Ellsberg: You see articles now by people like Tom Friedman in the *New York Times* about what is to be said for the good side of empire. They are acting with more self-awareness and less apology. They’re making the case that the world needs an empire, and if not us, who? The arguments for this Iraq operation is the case made for empire, for the good countries of the world to exert leadership and bring enlightenment and order to the world. At least there is a good deal of skepticism

I think the fact that there is as much criticism as there is, and it is growing, could induce Bush to move quicker. Cheney said time is not on our side. He thinks opinion is going against him and it gives him lots of incentive to do what he can. So Bush is announcing that we are what any other nation will be perfectly fair in describing as a rogue superpower. We don’t feel bound by anything, really. All this stuff about the weather is not right and it takes longer to prepare is disinformation to confuse the Iraqis and catch them by surprise. I and a lot of other people will do what we can to avert that. I think there is a chance of averting it by drawing on valid analogies and what memories there are of Vietnam.

Q: As a thought experiment, let’s compare Powell in regard to the stance you took when placing loyalty to country over loyalty to a boss.

Ellsberg: Powell is in the position that McNamara was in early 1966. By then McNamara felt that our policy was not only hopeless but wrong, and should end. But he didn’t chose to get out then. I suspect Powell’s inclination is to

act very much as McNamara did. Others had that temptation, like George Ball in 1964 and 1965, feeling that they might at a critical moment influence the president in the right direction. I didn't have that positive incentive to keep my mouth shut.

I believe McNamara thought of himself as protecting the country from what the Joint Chiefs of Staff then wanted to do. Powell may be staying in for a similar reason. Not to protect us from the Joint Chiefs, who probably agree with him very closely, and he was chairman of the JCS himself, but to protect us from civilian militarists who are far more reckless and unconstrained than the military. So in a way the position of civilians and the military have reversed since the Vietnam War. The Joint Chiefs then were pressing for a larger and bloodier and more dangerous war than we did see. I think that the public to this day has underestimated how dangerous that situation was. That perception from the inside—and everything I have seen since has confirmed it—was driving me [in the Pentagon Papers episode].

Q: I was surprised to see LBJ say he would have given Westmoreland 200,000 more troops in 1968 but for the leaks.

Ellsberg: I wasn't entirely sure where LBJ stood in 1968. I did learn from Paul Joseph who did interviews of Westmoreland and Wheeler who brought it out that he was very open to enlarging the war, more than I realized. I did fear that this polity would go in that direction. I believe we now have a Secretary of State who really does not want to go into Iraq, but I see very strong signs that he may be drawn into serving as the rationalizer and legitimizer of this attack. I do think, just like McNamara, he could prevent this war

Q: How?

Ellsberg: His prestige is such that if he resigned, the resignation alone might have a great effect, although of course there's no guarantee. If he honorably got up and did what [weapons inspector] Scott Ritter, a former marine colonel did in speaking out about what he knew as an insider. He could do what McNamara should have done, and that was to testify before Congress with documents as to what the facts were. If McNamara did it in closed session with Fulbright in February of 1966, but let it leak out, I believe he could have ended the war. It would have been at the cost of any further executive appointment and membership of the establishment. The advantage would be saving forty to fifty thousand American lives and several million Vietnamese lives. That is what he would have to weigh.

The same is true of Powell. We are looking at horrendous things that may happen, in terms of a real nuclear war resulting from this, and even short of that, enormous Iraqi casualties and perhaps significant American casualties if city fighting does result. And a wave of hatred in the Arab and Muslim world that poses a concrete [threat of] terrorism in this country.

Q: Aren't there real dangers of nuclear terrorism?

Ellsberg: There are real dangers, but the war against Iraq is a diversion. The fear is that Saddam will give the weapons to Al Qaeda. Now that would be making a case for preventive war. It is important to keep Al Qaeda from getting nuclear weapons, but the notion that they would get them from Saddam is close to ridiculous.

The notion that Al Qaeda would get them from Pakistan is not ridiculous at all. The notion that they would get them from Russia is not crazy either—not by Russian state action, not from Putin, but by buying or stealing or hijacking them. That is a real danger and there is no one in the world I'd less rather have them than Osama bin Laden. How do you deal with that? You deal with that by helping with Russian security for their weapons. You deal with it by dealing with Pakistan in a number of ways which are not improved by attacking Iraq. The nuclear weapon would be safer from Al Qaeda if Saddam weren't attacked than they would be in Russia or Pakistan. So that is a total hoax there.

Q: Another theme of your book is that speaking truth to power is not enough.

Ellsberg: During the Vietnam War a major theme of a Quaker activist group I knew of was telling truth to power, which was exemplified by literally going into the Pentagon or White House and speaking frankly in a dialogue with them. I don't at all want to say that is worthless, but there is a difference in values and priorities there. These people are not going to be reached by that. There is an expression in Congress—that "They may not see the light, but they'll feel the heat."

What people in power need is to have their own power undermined by exposure of their wrongly held secrets and their pretensions to legitimacy and their concealment of what their real politics are. They need to be confronted by generating counterpower through Congress, the courts, the Unions, the universities, and the press. None of which did very well in the Vietnam War.

Still, without all of them in motion, it would have gone on a lot longer and it would have gotten a lot worse.

So I think an important lesson of the book is that I was inspired by Randy Keeler and others who stood in the doorway of the Oakland induction center, and were in demonstrations, and who were not simply speaking the truth behind closed doors to power. They were inspiring people to join in a movement that challenged that power. I was convinced then and I am all the more convinced now that this has to be done nonviolently. Violence simply plays into the hands of the violent institutions. It legitimizes their means and legitimizes their use of them, and justifies repression. It makes it easier for them.

Q: Does any other lesson occur to you looking back on the Pentagon Papers?

Ellsberg: Given a non-violent philosophy, the personal risk-taking that's involved in telling the truth that the boss does not want told can be effective, although there's no guarantee of it. If Powell stays in office I suspect it will be partly in the tradition of a McNamara who says to himself that nothing he does as an individual against the will of the president will have any effect. I've known so many people who tell themselves that 'nothing I do can possibly have any effect.' Well, actually I did, and Nixon through his own reaction did things that brought himself down. You can have an effect.