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Kissinger and Ellsberg in Vietnam

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Before Henry Kissinger was secretary of state in the Nixon administration and Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times in 1971, they met in Saigon in July 1966 to swap views on Vietnam and discuss how the war was going. Then a Harvard professor looking to make his move into politics, Kissinger was visiting Vietnam as a consultant to Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., a fellow Harvardian and former senator who was serving as US ambassador. Ellsberg, a military analyst who had been in Vietnam for ten months as an assistant to the CIA agent Edward Lansdale, gave Kissinger two important pieces of advice: never talk to someone in the presence of their boss, and do not go to official briefings. Rarely for an American in Vietnam, he also suggested that Kissinger interview some Vietnamese.

Ellsberg was studying pacification for Lansdale, which meant he was looking for ways to subdue the rural population. This was Lansdale's second tour of duty in Vietnam. He had become famous in the 1950s when he helped to establish the former French colony of Cochinchina as an independent state, eventually called the Republic of Vietnam. After France's defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the United States had plucked Ngo Dinh Diem, the country's first leader (1954-63), out of a Belgian monastery and equipped him with an army. Aided by lots of money from the CIA, Lansdale managed to create South Vietnam as a client state led by a corrupt but reliable group of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam.

Having already performed a similar miracle in the Philippines, Lansdale was a favourite of President Kennedy. Unfortunately, after Lansdale's return to the Department of Defense, where he worked under cover as a colonel in the US Air Force, Kennedy gave the former advertising man an assignment that he described as his biggest failure. Lansdale was supposed to arrange the assassination of Fidel Castro. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 was the Soviet Union's response to Lansdale's larger assignment—to invade Cuba, for a makeover of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion the previous year. By 1965, with Castro still alive and Cuba still communist, Lansdale got turfed back to Vietnam. Travelling with him was an odd

assortment of assassins and bagmen, and one newcomer to his team, Dr Daniel Ellsberg, a civilian adviser whose own career in the Pentagon had hit a dead end.

Ellsberg and Kissinger had crossed paths at Harvard in the 1950s, when Kissinger was a young assistant professor of history and Ellsberg was a graduate student in economics, specialising in game theory. If Ellsberg was working for a spy, Kissinger was actually a spy. For all the books written about him, few dwell on the act of treachery during the election of 1968 that got him his job as President Nixon's national security adviser. Always willing to trade inside information for political power, Kissinger was an FBI snitch on his colleagues at Harvard, but he was so successful in his next act of betrayal that Nixon thought he owed his election as president to Kissinger's dark hand.

A courtier liberal with his praise, Kissinger on several occasions would describe Ellsberg as the person from whom he had learned the most about Vietnam. Ellsberg had spent a year in the Pentagon studying the war as an assistant to John McNaughton, right-hand man to Robert McNamara, the secretary of defence. Now as part of Lansdale's team, Ellsberg was travelling deep into the countryside. For his part, Ellsberg was impressed that Kissinger followed his advice. 'McNamara never did any of these things,' he said. 'He always talked to district advisers in the presence of the general in charge and never seemed to realize how much he was being fooled.'

Kissinger and Ellsberg were advisers to men of power, whom they hoped to succeed by themselves becoming powerful men. Kissinger accomplished this task. Ellsberg failed. His military service had been honourable but undistinguished. His first marriage had collapsed. He had worked in the Pentagon for a year before being edged out to Vietnam. Nonetheless, Ellsberg was a government employee at a higher rank and with more security clearances than anything Kissinger, a private citizen, had yet to obtain. He was a good storyteller and quick learner. He knew the lie of the land and was, indeed, Kissinger's best informant. From that point on, as their lives intersected, Vietnam was the fulcrum on which Kissinger and Ellsberg balanced their careers.

A Jewish refugee whose family fled Germany in 1938 when he was fifteen, Heinz Kissinger—renamed Henry on his arrival in Manhattan—was working in a shaving brush factory and studying accounting at City College when he was launched on his diplomatic career. Drafted in 1942, Private Kissinger marched across Europe with the 84th Infantry Division, where this fluent German speaker was soon administering captured towns and working in military intelligence. After the war, the GI Bill sent Kissinger to Harvard, where this son of a former school teacher in Bavaria devoted himself to studying history. As an undergraduate,

graduate student and then—after three years of seasoning at the Council on Foreign Relations—as a professor at Harvard, Kissinger specialised in studying the aftermath of revolutions. Putting the world back together after the Napoleonic wars was the subject of his doctoral dissertation. The topic might seem obscure, except when one notices that the first paragraph mentions nuclear weapons.

Atomic warfare was Kissinger's other area of expertise. In *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*—a book admired by Nixon when it was published in 1957—Kissinger argued that America's post-war military strategy was based on old-fashioned ideas about nukes. They were not just big bombs that flattened every building within a mile of where they exploded. They could also be shaped into handier little devices, known as tactical nuclear weapons, and used in a much wider variety of military confrontations. Kissinger's book got him hired as a professor at Harvard (over the opposition of colleagues who found his scholarship feeble and most of his ideas borrowed from other, unacknowledged, sources.) The book also launched Kissinger into the world of military consultants—the same world that Ellsberg, seven years his junior, would occupy when he too became a specialist in nuclear weapons.

Kissinger was looking for a presidential candidate to advise and perhaps accompany into the White House. He favoured Republicans but offered his services to Democrats and Republicans alike, and it was this equal-opportunity approach to foreign policy that got him his big break. In 1968, Nixon won a razor-thin victory over Hubert Humphrey, his Democratic opponent, by violating the Logan Act, which forbids unauthorised citizens from interfering in the foreign affairs of the United States. Nixon had secretly promised the president of South Vietnam that if he failed to sign a peace treaty ending the war in 1968, he would get a better deal the following year from the newly elected President Nixon. Guiding Nixon's hand—with leaks from the negotiations in Paris, while at the same time serving as an adviser to Nixon's opponent—was Kissinger.

Ellsberg is a divided man. The first split came over the 4 July holiday in 1946, when he was fifteen. Driving across country from their home in Michigan to a family reunion in Colorado, Ellsberg's father fell asleep at the wheel and hit a bridge abutment, shearing the car in half and killing Ellsberg's mother and sister. Ellsberg was in a coma for thirty-six hours. His parents had abandoned Judaism for Christian Science, which calls for healing through faith. Ellsberg today would be crippled, with one leg shorter than the other, if his Jewish relatives had not insisted on having his broken bones set by a doctor.

Ellsberg's father was a structural engineer who worked on large projects, including America's first nuclear reactor for producing plutonium in Hanford,

Washington state. He knew the risks he was taking while driving after a sleepless night, but Ellsberg's mother demanded they press on. Analysing risk and uncertainty became Ellsberg's academic speciality. But his life has been equally marked by anger at authority figures who make bad decisions.

He graduated from Harvard in 1952 with a degree in economics, which at the time included the new science of game theory. The games he studied involved decision making under uncertain circumstances. The biggest of these games was trying to figure out which nuclear power, the Soviet Union or the United States, could gain an advantage over the other. Was there some opening move that allowed you to wipe out your opponent before the missiles began raining back on you? Otherwise, you had to accept mutually assured destruction—the MAD balance of terror that still dominates world affairs.

Ellsberg was offered a junior fellowship at Harvard. He chose instead to go to Cambridge University for a year, and then he did something even more surprising. He joined the Marine Corps. By this point in his life, Ellsberg had made other surprising moves. As an undergraduate, he had married a nineteen-year-old Radcliffe student, Carol Cummings, with whom he had two children before they divorced in 1964. After nearly flunking out of officer training due to a bad case of asthma, Ellsberg got to lead a rifle corps, but the closest he came to combat was floating in the Mediterranean on a boat full of seasick soldiers during the Suez crisis.

Finally back at Harvard for that delayed fellowship, the former Marine and now graduate student Ellsberg met the assistant professor Kissinger. Nixon's White House tapes record Kissinger describing Ellsberg as the smartest student he ever had, although Ellsberg was never Kissinger's student. Their relationship was more one of peers, and what most impressed Kissinger was a series of lectures Ellsberg delivered for Kissinger's Harvard International seminar, a summer programme for government officials from around the world. (These were some of the people Kissinger spied on for the FBI.)

Ellsberg's lectures on 'The Art of Coercion', including lectures on 'The Theory and Practice of Blackmail' and 'The Political Use of Madness', impressed Kissinger, who would use these ideas throughout his diplomatic career. Blackmail and madness were also key components in what Nixon later described as his madman theory. Hitler had gobbled up half of Europe without firing a shot. 'The artist', as Ellsberg calls him, was a master bluffer. Neither Nixon nor Kissinger would ever attain this degree of artistry, but not for want of trying.

Ellsberg left Harvard in 1958, at the age of twenty-eight, to work for the RAND Corporation, a military think tank near the Santa Monica pier in Los Angeles. (RAND stands for research and development.) Harvard fellows usually leave with a PhD, but Ellsberg, who always had trouble meeting deadlines, took another four years to finish his doctorate. In *Risk, Ambiguity and Decision*, he applied game theory to understanding why people, when faced with uncertain odds, often act against their own self-interest. Economists today might not know that the Ellsberg paradox is named after the world's most famous leaker.

RAND was started after the Second World War as an Air Force think tank for planning thermonuclear war, and this was Ellsberg's first job. He toured US military bases in the Pacific, where he was surprised to learn about the precarity of the US nuclear arsenal. It was on hair-trigger alert, with authority to launch a nuclear attack delegated not just to military commanders, but all the way down to base commanders. This was done on the premise that a surprise attack from the Soviet Union demanded retaliation, even in the absence of an order from the president. These facts were confirmed when Ellsberg and a colleague snuck out of the Pentagon one day to watch *Dr. Strangelove*, Stanley Kubrick's film about nuclear weapons, which features dialogue lifted directly from some of Ellsberg's colleagues at RAND. Ellsberg realised that this madcap farce was actually a fair description of US nuclear policy. 'That was a documentary!' he told his companion afterwards.

Ellsberg quit his career as a nuclear strategist at RAND in the autumn of 1964 and went to work full time in the Pentagon as an assistant to McNaughton and McNamara. In a small office next to McNaughton's, Ellsberg was given the assignment of reading all the cable traffic on Vietnam. As voluminous streams of material crossed his desk, he started reading only the secret stuff and then only the top-secret stuff and then the specialised, compartmentalised stuff that was even more secret. Visitors found Ellsberg's desk covered with towering piles of red-bordered documents, which were supposed to be locked in the safe in his office, but that McNaughton, and later Lansdale, would chastise him for leaving unsecured.

As Ellsberg told Studs Terkel in an interview published in 1972 under the title 'Paper Pushers':

I was in the Pentagon working for men who were addicted to the flow of secret information that passed their desks. It was like electricity coursing through their veins. In fact, the speed of decision-making, flickering from one part of the world to another—a weapons system to be decided on, or one set of decisions about force levels, or big wars or little wars—from moment to moment, almost a

kaleidoscopic kind of effect, gave their lives an electric excitement to which they were clearly addicted and which they could not imagine living without. They were nervous men, constantly flipping pencils, constantly drumming on tables, cracking their knuckles, as they moved from one decision to another with this hypnotic fascination. The course of power, however, could only be theirs if they toed the mark. They could lose access to that flow of information in minutes if they made the wrong move. They would not be invited to the next White House meeting. They would no longer be in it, be part of it.

Ellsberg was never cut out to be a paper pusher. There was always more to learn as he uncovered paradoxes and anomalies. His best thinking was strategic, not the kind of snap decision making required of military managers. I caught a glimpse of this when I visited Ellsberg for a couple of days at his house in the Berkeley hills overlooking San Francisco Bay. Ellsberg is a man who is perpetually distracted by adding new facts to what he knows or what he thought he knew or could have known but didn't. On our first morning together, we passed through the kitchen and stepped out back to the combination studio, guest house and storage building where Ellsberg works.

We began with a tour of the premises. First there was Ellsberg's office, with a big computer monitor and telephone on a desk lit with clip lamps. On the wall facing the desk was a towering stack of books and overstuffed cardboard boxes filled with files marked 'Cuban Missile Crisis', 'Nuclear War Planning' and other subjects he was pondering while writing *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, which was published in 2017. We pushed from Ellsberg's office into another large room filled with files and on from there—after walking through the apartment of the tenant who shares Ellsberg's property—into another room filled with files. Ellsberg was talking nonstop on our tour, picking up folders, riffling through them, reading comments written on the margins and barely restraining himself from scribbling a fresh thought, as he kept getting tugged to update, clarify, correct or strengthen whatever argument he was making the last time he looked into these folders. The same thing happened when Ellsberg went to work in the Pentagon. Facing the flood of information crossing his desk, he fell into the kind of funk that overcomes a man who wants to know everything in a world where there is too much to know.

McNaughton nudged Ellsberg out of the ring of Pentagon offices with outside views over the Potomac and sent him down to an inner ring to work on long-range planning. Knowing it was time to go, Ellsberg switched his Pentagon position to a similar rank in the State Department and attached his star to Edward Lansdale, who would be returning to Vietnam in September 1965. Vietnam offered

Ellsberg a chance to redo everything that so far had been a disappointment in his life. Recently divorced, he could play around with as many women as he wanted—an interest he shared with his best friend in Vietnam, John Paul Vann. The subject of Neil Sheehan's book *A Bright Shining Lie*, Vann had been cashiered from the military for statutory rape, but he was now back in Vietnam as a civilian, acting like a military commander. Vann had not one but two Vietnamese wives and loved roaring at high speed over the back roads of Vietnam, racing from one sexual conquest to the next, often with Ellsberg at his side, while they pointed their machine guns out the window and prepared to pop off grenades at roadside ambushes.

Vietnam was also a makeover for Ellsberg's military career. He loved toting a Swedish 'K' machinegun into the countryside on weekends, walking point on military patrols and sneaking up on enemy machine gun nests to 'take them out' from behind—the kind of thing that would have won him a silver star, if he had been in the military. Lansdale's team consisted of operatives experienced in organising coups, assassinating officials behind enemy lines, mounting disinformation campaigns and other skills developed for psychological warfare. Since Ellsberg knew none of this stuff, Lansdale assigned Lucien 'Lou' Conein—his liaison to the Corsican mafia and paymaster who had arranged for the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, the South Vietnamese president—to watch over Ellsberg. He needed a lot of watching. Apart from spending weekends ducking for cover on military patrols, he began an affair with the Eurasian mistress of a Corsican mobster who threatened to kill him. It was only Conein's threat of massive retaliation that saved his life.

Ellsberg was a warrior in Vietnam, shooting at enemies in the field and helping the US military prevail—facts that are hard to square with his later work as an anti-war protester. At one point he recommended firing all forty of Vietnam's provincial governors and replacing them with hand-picked officials supposedly free of corruption—in other words, making Vietnam an American colony. The switch from warrior to peacemaker came later than Ellsberg likes to acknowledge and is more morally ambiguous. He says he had a red line for his actions in Vietnam: he would not engage in torture. But in a memo written in May 1967, right before his return to the US, he called for 'A much more serious effort to destroy, attrite, demoralize or neutralize the VC [communist] provincial forces', which was 'crucial to widespread or lasting expansion of government control'.

During the evenings he spent chatting with Lansdale, Ellsberg heard many tales from the early days, when this master spy had organised Cao Dai and other 'third-force' militias to fight the French revanchists who were trying to hold on to

their former colony. What surprised Ellsberg later was how closely Lansdale guarded his secrets. Even when deep into his cups, he never mentioned Operation Mongoose, his attempt to assassinate Castro. On the other hand, Ellsberg quickly realised that Lansdale was a spent force. His counter-insurgency strategy for 'winning hearts and minds' had been surpassed by a full-scale war that included everything except nuclear weapons, and Ellsberg expected that even these would soon be used in Vietnam.

In November 1966, Ellsberg jumped ship. He went to work as an assistant to the US deputy ambassador William Porter, who ran the pacification programmes and other civilian affairs in Vietnam. Once again, at age thirty-six, Ellsberg found himself a poor fit for a line position on someone else's staff. He spent more time in the field, going out on patrol week after week and then daily, almost around the clock, while dreaming about a heroic death. 'I had decided to die in a glorious way in Vietnam,' Ellsberg said, before he finally woke up to the fact that he was more likely to get maimed than killed and that he was fighting some kind of depression, which he later identified as a 'death wish'. As Ellsberg told biographer Tom Wells, 'I suppose I have never been so frustrated and depressed in my life.'

It was this death wish that led Ellsberg, on his return to America the following spring, to seek the services of Dr Lewis Fielding, a psychiatrist practising in Beverly Hills. Ellsberg reported four days a week for two and a half years of psychoanalysis. Those familiar with the story of the Pentagon Papers know the importance of these sessions, not just for Ellsberg, but also for Nixon. Nixon's Watergate cover-up would unravel when it was learned that the CIA operatives known as the plumbers, who had broken into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel, had actually begun their work earlier, when they broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, looking for secrets they could use to smear Ellsberg's reputation.

Ellsberg was working again at RAND in 1967 when McNamara tapped him as one of the thirty-six scholars and policy analysts who would compile the Pentagon Papers. This top-secret history of American policy making in Vietnam, from 1945 to 1967, revealed a cascading pile of lies as one US president after another pursued a losing war while pretending to be seeking peace. Although he had been privy to some of the correspondence and worked in Vietnam, Ellsberg was dumbfounded when he sat down to read all forty-seven volumes of the report in the summer of 1968. The Vietnam War gave rise to what was called the credibility gap—the growing belief that the US government was lying to people about the reasons for fighting the war and its progress. Ellsberg held in his hands the smoking gun, proof that the credibility gap was actually a torrent of official lies

flowing throughout the thirty years that France and then the United States tried to reimpose colonial rule over Vietnam.

Ellsberg and Kissinger crossed paths at various conferences, where Kissinger at the time was advancing the idea of a 'decent interval'—a face-saving period of negotiated withdrawal before Vietnam fell out of the news and into the hands of the communists. When Kissinger came to give one of these talks at RAND in the fall of 1968, he began his remarks with what one witness described as a 'love fest' of praise for Ellsberg, whom he again described as the person from whom he had learned the most about Vietnam. Kissinger also made unflattering remarks about the newly elected president, calling Nixon 'unfit for the job'. This did not prevent Kissinger from accepting the position of national security adviser when Nixon offered it to him a few weeks later.

To prepare for his initial White House briefing, Kissinger hired RAND to analyse US options in Vietnam. Ellsberg and a colleague flew to New York on Christmas Day of 1968, and spent two days briefing Kissinger at the Hotel Pierre, which he and Nixon were using as their post-election office. Ellsberg calculated the odds and teased out all the possible strategies Kissinger might recommend. Actually, not all the strategies. Kissinger vetoed any plans for unilateral withdrawal. Then he asked Ellsberg to provide what he thought was impossible—a 'winning' strategy for the war in Vietnam.

Kissinger hired Ellsberg again the following March, when he spent a month in Washington working on a national security memorandum, NSSM-1. This work involved querying all the US agencies involved in the war and compiling a 500-page report on their activities. Again, Ellsberg would discover later that he had been kept in the dark about what was actually happening. March was the month in which Nixon and Kissinger began the secret bombing of Cambodia and started to prepare the nuclear threats they presumed would win the war.

For the next six years, Nixon and Kissinger would threaten to nuke Vietnam, nuke Russia, nuke China. In November 1969, they actually scrambled bombers loaded with nuclear weapons and flew them for two weeks along Soviet borders. Nixon believed that the Korean War had been ended by Eisenhower threatening a nuclear attack on China. Now he was trying his own version of the madman theory, as he and Kissinger drew up a list of targets to be bombed, including rail lines along the Chinese border. What foiled their ultimatum were the large anti-war mobilisations of October and November that year, in effect general strikes, which filled the streets with millions of protesters. *The Movement and the Madman*, a film being made by Stephen Talbot, will document how Nixon and Kissinger, fearing chaos on the home front, were forced to retreat. As Nixon later admitted,

‘[t]he only chance for my ultimatum to succeed was to convince the Communists that I could depend on solid support at home if they decided to call my bluff.’

Ellsberg was beginning to speak out against the war. At one of these events, a meeting of the War Resisters League in Philadelphia, he again faced a turning point in his life. After listening to Randy Kehler, a young Harvard graduate, describe how he would soon be going to prison as a draft resister, Ellsberg found himself weeping uncontrollably for an hour in the men’s room. ‘It was as though an ax had split my head, and my heart broke open,’ he wrote in *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, published in 2002. ‘But what had really happened was that my life had split in two.’ Appalled by the waste of this young man’s life, Ellsberg kept hearing the phrase run through his head: ‘We are eating our young’.

In October 1969, with the aid of his RAND colleague Anthony Russo, Ellsberg began spiriting the 7,000 pages of the Pentagon Papers out of his office safe and photocopying them. Also helping on nights when Ellsberg was supposed to be babysitting were his thirteen-year-old son, Robert, who ran the photocopy machine, and ten-year-old daughter, Mary, who was excited about cutting the words ‘TOP SECRET’ off the top and bottom of each photocopied page.

Ellsberg and Kissinger would meet again in the summer of 1970 at what was known as the Western White House, Nixon’s estate in San Clemente, south of Los Angeles. At the first of these meetings, Ellsberg tagged along as the uninvited guest of their mutual friend Lloyd Shearer, celebrity gossip columnist for *Parade* magazine. Kissinger, who, like Ellsberg, had divorced his first wife in 1964, was beginning to date Hollywood actresses, and he wanted Shearer’s advice on how to leak stories about his amorous conquests. Shearer, one of the few people who knew Kissinger well enough to play practical jokes on him, would begin sending him ‘autographed’ portraits from starlets saying things like ‘Thanks for the wonderful night in Oxnard’.

Kissinger began their lunch with a courteous flourish. He told Shearer that Ellsberg was the man who had taught him the most—not about Vietnam, as Ellsberg expected him to say—but about ‘bargaining’. Kissinger was referring to Ellsberg’s lectures at Harvard on ‘The Art of Coercion’.

‘When I rethought that incident later, it made the hair on the back of my neck stand up,’ Ellsberg said in an interview with *Rolling Stone*. ‘The lectures I had given had to do with Hitler’s blackmail of Austria and Czechoslovakia in the late Thirties, which had allowed him to take over those countries just by threatening their destruction.

‘Kissinger had revealed a major motive of the invasion [of Cambodia] was to convince the Russians and the Chinese that our decision-making was unpredictable … It was a commitment to madness. To realize—not that Kissinger had learned this tactic from me, which is very doubtful, but that such a thought truly was in his mind, enough so that he remembered the analogous thesis that I had presented ten years earlier—this was chilling. It confirmed the nature of his policy and where it might go.’

Wanting to talk to Shearer privately, Kissinger arranged for Ellsberg to dine separately, at the other end of the house, with his assistant, General Al Haig. In August Ellsberg married Patricia Marx, but he cut his Hawaiian honeymoon in half to return to California for another meeting with Kissinger. The meeting was cancelled. Ellsberg drove to San Clemente for another aborted meeting. Then, on a third try, he was let through the gates and ushered into Kissinger’s presence. Ellsberg described this meeting as an attempt to leak information *into* the government. He wanted Kissinger to know that Nixon’s duplicitous statements about wanting to end the war were known to be false, and that his lying to the public was a strategy that had already been tried and failed.

Ellsberg handed Kissinger a piece of paper—a single page—outlining in game theoretical terms what he foresaw: ‘the slow reduction of forces, threats, demonstrative actions like Cambodia, the likelihood of future invasions, the ultimate mining of Haiphong harbour, and the deliberate deception of the public.

‘As I recited the policy, he looked at me with very narrowed eyes, in a way that assured me I was not on the wrong track, but he made no response. He drummed his fingers on the table and said, “I do not want to discuss our policy; let us turn to another subject.”’

They began discussing the *Pentagon Papers*. Unknown to Ellsberg, Kissinger had consulted on the project during its first month, and he had a copy in his White House safe.

‘Have you read it?’

‘No, should I?’ Kissinger asked. ‘Do we really have anything to learn from this study?’

‘My heart sank,’ Ellsberg told *Rolling Stone*. ‘The major lesson of the study was that each person repeated the same patterns in decision-making and pretty much the same policy as his predecessor, without even knowing it.’

‘After all, we make decisions very differently now,’ Kissinger assured him, while dismissing the twenty years of history described in the papers.

Ellsberg reminded him that the secret bombing of Cambodia was not all that different from what previous administrations had tried to do in Southeast Asia.

'You must understand, Cambodia was undertaken for very complicated reasons.'

'Henry, there hasn't been a rotten decision in this area for twenty years which was not undertaken for very complicated reasons. And they were usually the same complicated reasons.'

Kissinger ended the discussion, saying he wanted to see Ellsberg the following week in Washington. That meeting and one after it and then a third were all cancelled at the last minute. Ellsberg stopped calling.

Their final encounter came in January 1971, at a conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where Ellsberg had moved the previous autumn to take up a research position and write a book, which was never finished. As the guest of honour, Kissinger had assured the audience that the administration was doing everything possible to end the war in Vietnam. 'I had decided on a very careful phrasing of one question to ask him,' Ellsberg told *Rolling Stone*. 'I figured it was the last time I would be speaking to him.'

The question was couched in the game theoretical terms that Kissinger and Ellsberg knew so well. 'What is your best estimate of the number of Indochinese that we will kill, pursuing your policy in the next twelve months?'

After a long silence, Kissinger asked Ellsberg to propose alternatives. Refusing to take the bait, he repeated his question. There was another long silence, and then the student leading the meeting stood up and brought it to an end. Instead of overseeing the war 'trending down', as Kissinger had assured his audience it was doing, he returned to Washington that night to direct the pre-invasion bombardment of Laos.

On 13 June 1971, the *New York Times* began running the first excerpts from the Pentagon Papers. Nixon was hardly concerned by these revelations from earlier, Democratic, administrations. Kissinger was apoplectic. This was a major diplomatic leak, making the United States look unreliable as a negotiator, he said, but it was particularly damaging to Kissinger, who had worked so closely with Ellsberg, whom he now described as 'the most dangerous man in America', who had 'to be stopped at all costs'.

At Kissinger's urging, Nixon set the wheels in motion to charge Ellsberg with espionage and break into his psychiatrist's office. Kissinger was sure they would find lots of dirt on someone whom he described to Nixon as a sex-crazed

pervert who enjoyed shooting Vietnamese peasants from helicopters. Nixon quickly came to believe that he had a problem with *two* Jews—Ellsberg and Kissinger. As he said to Robert Haldeman, his chief of staff, referring to his enemies, 'Henry must be torn on the Jewish business. Every one of them is a Jew. The government is full of Jews … most Jews are disloyal … There are exceptions, but, Bob, generally speaking, you can't trust the bastards. They turn on you.'

The *New York Times* was enjoined from publishing more excerpts from the Pentagon Papers—a case Nixon lost in the Supreme Court—but to hide his illegal meddling in the Paris peace talks and nuclear threats, Nixon ordered his men to stage a fire at the Brookings Institute and get CIA 'firemen' to grab the secret documents from their safe. Brookings was never bombed. Ellsberg's psychiatrist kept no notes. The CIA operatives brought up from Miami to 'neutralise' Ellsberg at an anti-war rally in Washington were detained by the police and aborted their mission. The plumbers got caught breaking into the Watergate Hotel, and Nixon spun through one cover-up after another until he resigned on 8 August 1974. While forty government officials in his administration were either indicted or went to jail, Nixon was pardoned by Gerald Ford, his successor.

Kissinger survived the scandal. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 for finalising the Paris Peace Accords, although the war would not actually end until Saigon fell in April 1975. He remained secretary of state until Ford lost the presidential election in 1976 to Jimmy Carter. Kissinger penned his memoirs and entered the ranks of elder statesmen, summoned from time to time to arrange one of the backchannel deals for which he was famous. Over the years, as scholars found his fingerprints on the murderous coup in Chile, arming Pakistan during its war with India, the Cambodian genocide and 3 million civilian deaths in Southeast Asia, opinion divided on whether Kissinger was a masterful diplomat or murderous criminal.

While Ellsberg has spent his life apologising for what he did in Vietnam and earlier at RAND, Kissinger has apologised for nothing, except on the rare occasion when an embarrassing fact came to light. A 2016 article in the *Atlantic* was headlined, 'Henry Kissinger Will Not Apologize'.

Ellsberg regrets not releasing the Pentagon Papers earlier than he did. He has become the patron saint of leakers, penning editorials and appearing as an expert witness at the trials of Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and dozens of other whistleblowers. Ellsberg has also apologised for his work as a nuclear war planner. He thought he was adding safeguards to America's MAD strategy and refining targets, but in the end, this did nothing to keep the warheads from multiplying. Even before releasing the Pentagon Papers, Ellsberg was thinking about another

leak of nuclear war planning documents. Buried in a landfill to keep them from being seized by the FBI, these papers were lost in a tropical storm—another of Ellsberg's regrets. Soon after the Vietnam War ended, Ellsberg began getting arrested at nuclear bomb-making facilities in Colorado and California. Rumpled but always dressed in a suit, he has been hauled off to jail a few dozen times.

As for Kissinger, his few begrudging apologies have been forced from a man who continued to profit from his political connections well into his nineties. After being photographed in the White House with Donald Trump, Kissinger was later spotted in Beijing chatting with Xi Jinping. Kissinger's apologies mainly fall into the realm of non-apologies or blaming the people around him. 'You have to understand the Cold War context,' he says. The White House tapes got Kissinger in trouble for calling Indira Gandhi, the Indian president, 'a witch' or sharing antisemitic remarks with President Nixon. 'The emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union is not an objective of American foreign policy,' Kissinger told Nixon in 1973. 'And if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern.'

It was only after losing a nineteen-year lawsuit that Kissinger was forced to apologise for illegally wiretapping the telephone of Morton Halperin, his colleague on the National Security Council. In 2001, while visiting Paris, Kissinger was served with a summons from the criminal brigade of the French police. They wanted to examine his role in the disappearance of five French citizens during the rule of General Pinochet in Chile. Instead of appearing the following day at the Palais de Justice, Kissinger checked out of the Ritz Hotel and fled town.

In 2007, people were surprised to see Kissinger's name on an opinion piece published in the *Wall Street Journal*, where he was one of five cold warriors calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. As former defence secretary Richard Perry, one of the letter's authors, later explained, 'Henry likes to be front and center of big policy issues of the day, and this put him in that position, even though he didn't fully agree with all the conclusions'.

Ellsberg thinks of the whistleblowers who have stepped forward since he leaked the Pentagon Papers as his spiritual descendants, and often they cite him as an inspiring model. Because of these leaks, we know about war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, warrantless wiretaps, mass surveillance, financial crimes. The list of leakers is growing, but nowhere near as fast as Ellsberg had hoped. In 2012 he helped to found the Freedom of the Press Foundation, which defends whistleblowers and includes a secure drop box for documents. Beyond well-known leakers such as Assange and Edward Snowden, another important figure for Ellsberg is Mordechai Vanunu. In 2006, when Ellsberg won the Right Livelihood

Award, known as the alternative Nobel Prize, his acceptance speech in Stockholm focused on this Israeli technician. After revealing that Israel was a nuclear power with more than a hundred atomic bombs, Vanunu was kidnapped on the streets of Rome and spent eighteen years in prison, eleven of those in solitary confinement.

The young acolyte with whom Ellsberg feels closest is Snowden, the national security analyst who in 2013 revealed details about the United States' global surveillance programme. Ellsberg stood in for Snowden when he won the Right Livelihood Award in 2014. The day after the ceremony, Ellsberg flew to Moscow, where Snowden has been living in exile. Accompanying Ellsberg were John Cusack, the American actor who arranged the trip, Ole von Uexküll, executive director of the Right Livelihood Foundation, who would deliver Snowden's award in person, and Arundhati Roy, the Indian author and activist. The group spent two days together in Cusack's room at the Ritz Carlton Hotel overlooking Red Square and the Kremlin.

Ellsberg and Snowden were deep into exchanging information about the technical details of US surveillance when Roy interrupted to ask the moral question. Why had these men loaned their talents to a state that so casually killed civilians in Vietnam and other countries around the world? Snowden was a libertarian from a military family, a gullible young man when he began working for the CIA in 2006, at the age of twenty-three. She found Ellsberg more interesting: a deeper, almost tragic figure.

As Roy wrote later in an article she published about their meeting, Ellsberg possesses 'a disquieting combination of guilt and pride … This makes Dan a complicated, conflicted man—half-hero, half haunted spectre—a man who has tried to do penance for his past deeds by speaking, writing, protesting and getting arrested in acts of civil disobedience for decades.'

After Snowden had slipped out the door and headed back into exile, 'The memory that flashes up first in my mind is an image of Daniel Ellsberg,' Roy wrote. 'Dan, after all those hours of talking, [was] lying back on the bed, Christlike, with his arms flung open, weeping for what the United States has turned into—a country whose "best people" must either go to prison or into exile.'

In 2018 Ellsberg won the Olaf Palme Prize, a humanitarian award of US$75,000 from the Swedish labour movement. He got another financial break the following year when he sold his archives to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for US$2.2 million, of which US$1.35 million was provided by an anonymous donor. As Ellsberg explained in a lecture at the university, he had never invested in a retirement plan because he never expected to be alive in his

eighty-eighth year. Surely the world would have ended by then in a nuclear holocaust. ‘I’ve been saying for years that my retirement plan is prison,’ he said. ‘Thanks to the archive, our son will be able to keep our house, which did not appear to be in the cards.’ For an expert in calculating the odds, Ellsberg keeps getting surprised.

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