

On the Psychology of the National Security Managers

By Michael Maccoby

What was the psychology of those who organized and carried out the War in Southeast Asia? How important a role did the personalities of the Presidents and their main advisers play in making policy? The tentative findings of our study point to two main conclusions: 1) The character of J.F. Kennedy and his chief advisers played a key role in setting U.S. policy on the course of war; 2) The Kennedy administration brought a new type of social character into high posts. Men of this type thrived in an atmosphere of advanced technology where their brilliance and expertise could be put to work. They were opposed to traditional bureaucracies and the slow, cautious approach to policy. They shared what might be called the "game character", with a compulsive need to be winners. The combination of the game character, war, and advanced technology must be examined carefully. In the 60's, it unleashed the darkest forces in the American character.

Ideally, this study should be based on data from the individual psychoanalysis of national security managers. Lacking any such data, our statements about individual character must remain in part speculative. Our conclusions are based on three types of data. The first source is from statements and documents of national security managers which often allow interpretation of character because of the kinds of words used, the emphases made, and the implicit and explicit assumptions about human nature



This is also the case for the second source of data, the interviews by Ralph Stavins and other members of the project with key national security managers. Although the purpose of those interviews was not to gather psychological material, individuals often expressed their emotional attitudes and made statements which reflect their conscious and unconscious motivations. The third source of material is from interviews we ourselves have carried out with national security managers.<sup>1</sup>

The character of the President has a key role in determining policy.

Of course, the president's desires and goals are in part constrained. He must work together with executive agencies. Furthermore, his ideals and emotions must be in tune with those of his subordinates, at least to some extent, or his decisions will not be carried out.

To be sure, John F. Kennedy and Dwight D. Eisenhower shared many values.

Both were complex men, who like most of us had conflicting tendencies in their character. Notwithstanding, there were essential differences between them that led to support not only of different policies, but of different styles of government. The Eisenhower administration can be described as that of the traditional-bureaucratic-hoarding character. The Kennedy administration was that of the activist-game playing-phallic character.

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Douglass Carmichael for providing additional interview material and for his helpful suggestions concerning the analysis of the material.

I am also grateful to David Riesman for his helpful comments. My personal experiences have also been relevant to my interpretation of interview and other materials. From 1956 - 60 I was secretary to the Harvard University Committee on Educational Policy and worked directly and indirectly with individuals



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who later became high level national security managers. On three visits to Washington during the early 1960's, I met with some of these men and argued national policy with them.

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Eisenhower: The Traditional Hoarding Character

Eisenhower, traditional, ambitious, and moralistic, had a deep wish to keep the peace. He came into office with a promise to end the Korean war, and managed to keep the peace for eight years, in part by containing his own national security establishment, as well as the communists. It has been pointed out that Kennedy inherited plans for the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam from the Eisenhower administration. But one must recall that President Eisenhower was sometimes able to dampen such plans. In 1954 after going along with the Radford Plan for <sup>U.S.</sup> intervention in Vietnam, Eisenhower was able to scuttle the idea by adding the proviso the Allies and Congress must approve, which of course they did not. Here and elsewhere Eisenhower allowed his line managers to work up programs which in the end were dropped due to failure to meet bureaucratic requirements, including budgetary restraints.

Many of Eisenhower's chief managers were what we would term old-style bureaucratic businessmen. They were familiar with the practice of couching moral questions in terms of economy measures in order to avoid needless internal struggles within an organization. They tended to be conservative, authoritarian, frugal, both controlling, and with some notable exceptions selfcontrolled. The traditional hoarding character's values were expressed in the Eisenhower



presidential campaign against waste and corruption. The goal was to be as "clean as a hound's tooth". It seemed all the more shocking when such a symbol of New England self-containment and conservatism, Sherman Adams, turned out to have let his greed get out of control.<sup>1</sup>

The foreign policy ideology of the Eisenhower- Dulles era also appears rooted in this character syndrome. Essentially, it was one of containing the other side rather than trying to change the status-quo. The hoarding character is likely to put energy into self-protection and self-control, and to be cautious about new schemes.

Harold Lasswell's work as well as our own interviews suggest that many political leaders long for unlimited power.<sup>2,3</sup> To remain sane, this need must be kept in check. Those of the traditional hoarding type maintain equilibrium by control. In Freud's terms, they would tend to have the "anal character" syndrome of orderliness, stubbornness and parsimony.<sup>4</sup> The hoarding character also tends to project his repressed tendencies on to others, to be on the

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It should be kept in mind that the function of a hound's tooth is to rip flesh and to gnaw.

<sup>2</sup>A "case history" is to be found in Alexander and Juliette George's study of Woodrow Wilson, (Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1956). Wilson is an example of the traditional-hoarding character who loses control of himself.

<sup>3</sup>See Harold D. Lasswell, Psychopathology and Politics (The Viking Press, Inc., New York, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism," (1908) in Collected Papers, Vol.II (The Hogarth Press, London, 1956). The concept of the "hoarding character" comes from Erich Fromm's revision of Freudian drive theory and places the same "up-tight" syndrome of dynamic traits in a different theoretical context. See Man for Himself, New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1947.

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look-out, as it were, for the "dirtiness" he has contained within himself and which he feels others may let loose. The traditional-hoarding type is likely to divide the world into moral and immoral people, the immoral ones being those who do not control their "innate" greed and who lust for power. Thus ideologues like John Foster Dulles drew the picture of the communists as Godless minions of evil, who would grab as much as they could if not contained by force. Was this view in part a projection? The fact that those who held it ignored evidence that the Soviet Union had limited goals suggests that the view was emotionally rooted.

The Eisenhower administration internalized an image of a special kind of super-ego to the world, which threatened to unleash the full nuclear force against an immoral transgression that would upset the equilibrium of power. Yet, despite this image of ideological fervor, "there were those in the government and outside of it," as Marcus Raskin<sup>1</sup> has written, "who believed Dulles and Eisenhower were secret softies. These men, it was said, were hiding under brinksman talk and paper alliances, but they were unable to match their talk and alliances with military force."<sup>1</sup> The super-ego turned out to be more threat than substance. Eisenhower was not prepared to make war in order to maintain the national image.

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<sup>1</sup>Leonard S. Rodberg and Derek Shearer, eds., The Pentagon Watchers (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1970), p.86.



It would seem that, although a general, Eisenhower abhorred violence.

Individuals with the traditional-hoarding-controlling character are likely to fear violence in themselves and others, and at the least to see it as a radical change in the status quo. They experienced horror in destructiveness, and worried about the dehumanizing effect on America of fighting wars.

For someone like Eisenhower, war meant loosening the controls, opening the gates and letting go the demon held in check. Individuals like Eisenhower also try hard to control their own anger and violent tendencies, because they consider them evil and they threaten a self-image of goodness.

However, Eisenhower's attitude to violence was based on his love of life as well as his self-control. This could be seen not only in his goals for peace, but also through involuntary actions expressing a deep-rooted biophilic attitude, including his infectious smile and warm sense of humor. His behavior at the time of the Normandy invasion in 1944 also showed his humanity, when General Eisenhower spoke to the allied troops before they left England. There were tears in his eyes. Years later, on a T.V. interview, Walter Cronkite asked if it were common for generals to cry at such a moment. Eisenhower did not answer the question, but replied that he experienced the sadness of knowing that many of the soldiers would be killed.



Even during his presidency, Eisenhower's attempts at developing peaceful co-existence and keeping alive the "spirit of Camp David" were consistently attacked from within the government. While Eisenhower came to this spirit slowly and without sufficient firmness, he might have succeeded in establishing a more hopeful climate if he had not been sabotaged by the U-2 incident and by more activist national security managers.

### John F. Kennedy

The character of President Kennedy appears even now to be exceptionally complex. At times, it appeared that he had two sides, one compassionate and civilized, the other hard and mechanized, fascinated by the James Bond world of spying and high technology. In comparison to Eisenhower, Kennedy was more brilliant, impulsive, activist, and macho. He was more concerned about image in terms of glory and national prestige, and he identified himself with the national image.

Much has been written concerning J.F. Kennedy's upbringing in a highly competitive family, in which he struggled to win his father's approval and match the deeds of a gifted older brother. One might speculate that the tough competitive side of Kennedy's character was further reinforced by the experiences he shared with some others of his generation during World War II. He, like other young officers, stepped into positions of command over the heads of older people. Yet they had to prove themselves to the skeptical and perhaps envious professionals, the higher





ranking career officers. The generals and admirals were often on the look-out to put down the young officers. This experience, combining precocious command and worry about being taken seriously by older men, might help explain at least a part of Kennedy's character. It might also help explain his preoccupation with being respected by the "old men" like Khrushchev, DeGaulle, and Adenauer. Like the Henry V of Shakespeare's play, he had to prove that he was not merely a player of a child's games, but rather a "man" who was not afraid of risking violence. This may have become even more urgent after his early humiliation at the Bay of Pigs, and it is in this context that one must evaluate the policy in Southeast Asia.

### The Kennedy Managers

"History and sociology tend to exaggerate the part played in the origin of wars, ancient and modern by immediate material interests and the lust for power. Though the statesmen who plan the war may themselves regard it as a question of power-politics, in the great majority of the cases the real motives are to be found less in the 'necessities' of economic expansion, etc., than in pride and vainglory, the desire for prestige and all the pomps of superiority."<sup>1</sup>

Huizinga's statement appears particularly apt in understanding the motives

underlying many of the Kennedy programs. Although the administration often called

forth the spectre of the communists trying to rule the world, the U.S. programs in

Cuba and Vietnam and the strategical plans proposed were offensive rather than defensive.

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<sup>1</sup>Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play Element in Culture, (Boston, The Beacon Press, 1950), p.90.



Kennedy's top national security managers were not exactly alike. But most shared with him the goal of being "first" and the compulsive need to be a "winner". They called for sacrifice and dedication "to get the country moving" so that the United States could maintain a strategic advantage and be first in all measures of growth, military strength, first in determining the future of other peoples, and first in outer space. While some of these goals fit in with U.S. economic interests, the Kennedy managers as a group were rather contemptuous of most businessmen as overly timid and cautious. In Huizinga's terms, the military motives were rooted more in pride and vainglory than in immediate material interests.

The Kennedy administration changed the social character of the top national security manager. To be sure, there were holdovers such as Douglas Dillon who as undersecretary of state in April of 1960 had in the midst of Eisenhower's peace campaign accused the Soviets of imperialist ambitions and had called for a tougher attitude on the part of the U.S. and its allies. Dillon, the new secretary of the Treasury, joined the Kennedy group which affected a tough, macho style. From the start, they criticized the old men of the Eisenhower regime as overly passive, immobilized by a cumbersome nuclear strategy, and too cheap to buy the weapons needed. They justified the "need" for new technology including rockets, missiles and mobile forces using the phallic language of adolescents who are unsure of their manhood. They were constantly worried about the U.S. image, parti-



cularly its "posture" or "stance". "Penetration" and "thrust" were key words, and the national security managers worried about the U.S. being caught "naked", with its pants down. In their internal meetings and memos, the Kennedy managers showed no horror of violence. As Richard Barnet points out, they seemed to boast about their fearlessness in dealing with other peoples' lives, and any one of them with an abhorrence of violence would be considered squeamish, "irresponsible", and untrustworthy to make policy.<sup>1</sup>

Among the top to middle level Kennedy managers, one could distinguish two types, those with the "game character" and the visionaries. The gamesters were those who were mainly concerned with technique and tactics; their essential concern was in making the first team and developing winning plays.

The goals of the visionaries transcended these interests. They were the ideologues who wanted U.S. power to re-make the world, and build "nations" from "underdeveloped" countries. W.W. Rostow expressed these concerns even before his rise to power in a conference held in 1957 on "theory versus practice in American values and performance". In discussing the challenges of the future,

Rostow stated that:

"We have had difficulty in understanding the complex processes at work in the underdeveloped areas and in harmonizing our efforts with those of the men and women caught up in the great nationalistic revolutions now going forward in strategically decisive areas of the world. We have, to our cost, been excessively culture bound in facing this mammoth fact of the twentieth century."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See his chapter in this book.

<sup>2</sup>Elting E, Morison, ed., The American Style (New York, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p. 306.



In responding to Rostow at the time, David Riesman pointed out that Rostow's goal was a "chromium plated harmony" gained by "suppressing many things which non-Americans -- and many Americans, too -- would consider fundamental. Riesman then called attention to the above passage as typical of Rostow's message, and he pointed out that the images are power-ridden: "great nationalist", "strategically decisive", "facing this mammoth fact", "to our cost". Riesman's analysis was that in Rostow's metaphors he had revealed a power-driven desire to mechanize and rationalize the world in terms of an image of America that was more in Rostow's head than in reality.

It is true that neither Rostow nor Dean Rusk, the other key visionary, enjoyed a position of primary influence in the Kennedy administration. Only under Lyndon Johnson did Rostow enter the top ranks of presidential advisers where his theories helped to guide the course of an enlarged war. However, even earlier his views and his rhetoric prevailed over alternative, less power-ridden visions, such as those of Chester Bowles and Adlai Stevenson who were relegated to the category of the tender-hearted.

A manager with both visionary and game-playing tendencies was Robert S. McNamara who sometimes seemed to share Rostow's desire to make the world more rational. McNamara spoke of foreign policy as a gigantic struggle to decide which system -- capitalism or communism -- would



control modern technology. In his view, the communists represented the embodiment of evil in what he saw as their desire to conquer the world and totally mechanize it, destroying all traditions of freedom. In this, McNamara's manichean attitude allowed him to ignore his own tendencies in just this direction.

### The Game Character and Game Strategy

While J.F. Kennedy was president, the cosmic ideas of men like Rostow and Rusk were held somewhat in check since the president distrusted ideologues and was sensitive to fanaticism. Only later under a more naive and ebullent Lyndon Johnson was this approach allowed to "take off" for a while. The dominant style under Kennedy was cooler and more detached. A new type of national security manager <sup>the gamester</sup> seemed to appeal more to Kennedy, and to fit the needs of policy. This type was less ideological. Instead of seeing himself as participating in a world-wide struggle of good vs. evil, the game player tends to view the world as made up of different teams. For this type of individual the enemy can be Asians, Russians, or whatever. It is no longer necessary to whip up emotion by calling them dirty communists. Rather one seeks to win because to lose means being labelled a loser, i.e. a worthless person.

Whenever advanced technology was employed, the game character was to be found. The center of advanced technology was, of course, the Pentagon, newly invaded by Whiz Kids and other systems analysts,



with McNamara as chief coach or project manager. The attitude there was far less moralistic than in the State Department. At times it was rather cheerful, with an air of continual action and a boyish spirit of men who enjoyed their work of finding new techniques and strategies. The Pentagon managers seemed open to consider all possibilities and options, even with an outsider.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, some of the Pentagon managers appeared to relish a good intellectual challenge. In their language and thought, the staff under McNamara were increasingly influenced by the "game theorists" such as Oskar Morgenstern, T.C. Schelling, Henry Kissinger, and at the extreme, Herman Kahn, whose game theory moved far into the realm of science fiction. These ideas had a more ready audience because they fit the game character of many of these managers. Some of the national security managers of the 60's can be termed mixed types, men who combine features of both the visionary-ideologue and game player. Perhaps no individual is a completely pure type. However, within the growing National Security structure the new men tended to be game players, whose character best fit the structure and requirements of advanced technology.

What is the nature of game-like strategy and its relation to the game character? Let us first consider the strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1961 and 1962, I interviewed some of these managers and debated U.S. strategy with them. The result of these interviews was presented in: Michael Maccoby, "The Foundations of the Grand Design," in the Council for Correspondence Newsletter, No. 23, February, 1963.



The game theory approach converted international conflicts into game-  
paradigms which could then be worked out in terms of "rational" strategies.

At first, exponents such as Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin claimed the  
concrete usefulness of game theory to provide models for solving problems such  
as detecting cheating at nuclear testing. In explaining the rationale for treating  
arms control negotiations, detection procedures, and eventually other strategic  
nuclear questions as games, Schelling described not only a new strategic style  
but also the emotional attitude that went with it. He wrote that

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"Threats and responses to threats, reprisals and counter-reprisals, limited war, arms races, brinkmanship, surprise attack, trusting and cheating can be viewed as hotheaded or coolheaded activities. In suggesting that they can usefully be viewed, in the development of theory, as coolheaded activities, it is not asserted that they are in fact entirely coolheaded. Rather it is asserted that the assumption of rational behavior is a productive one in the generation of systematic theory. If the behavior were actually coolheaded, valid and relevant theory would probably be easier to create than it actually is. If we view our results as a benchmark for further approximation to reality, not as a fully adequate theory, we should manage to protect ourselves from the worst results of biased theory."<sup>1</sup>

Here, Schelling calls for a cool, detached approximation to reality.

But despite these qualifications, it turned out that the game theory approach to nuclear strategy and later to the Vietnam war did not seem to move closer to reality but rather in the other direction, of detaching policy from concrete human considerations.

Despite attempts to introduce the strategy of counterforce, game theory seemed grotesque when applied to nuclear war. The consequences of such a war made the analogy of a game totally inapplicable, and frustrated possibilities for testing the theory. It is in the nature of a game that one accepts with equanimity the possibility of losing; to lose is part of really playing;

in fact, the fun of games is that one can lose without being demolished or devastated. A man who bets his whole fortune or his life is not playing a game. Play belongs to the realm of freedom, not of life and death gambles, nor

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas C. Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960), p. 16.

For an earlier discussion of game theory, see Michael Maccoby, "The Social Psychology of Deterrence," in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Vol.XVII, No.7, September, 1961.





of compulsive living out of pathological power phantasies. Only the true player of games can reasonably rely on plausibilities, and educated guesses, playing to win while accepting the chance of losing. In matters of life and death, such as nuclear war or medicine, one does not rely on game-like guesses, but does everything possible to minimize the consequences themselves, even if this might involve compromising to avoid war or even amputating a leg to save a life. In total nuclear war, to lose implies total annihilation and as the Soviet Union developed a second strike capacity, it became clear that winning was impossible.

The war in S.E. Asia made the game strategy appear somewhat more plausible.

Here it seemed no longer a case of risking total annihilation but of carrying on a deadly contest that could conceivably be won. There was the chance for the players to propose and develop many new "plays", techniques and strategies. Partial scores could be kept in body counts. Furthermore, the war gave full scope to varieties of advanced technology.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the game strategists such as Kissinger

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<sup>1</sup>To the Washington politicians and the press, McNamara's computer print-outs used to justify his war predictions, seemed like a competent use of advanced technology. However, to engineers and managers of corporations using much more advanced technology than the auto industry, McNamara's invocation of the computer appeared more mystical than scientific. It was often merely a questionable application of cost-effectiveness methods, developed in a high volume industry, to measuring the progress of war. Beyond this, technical managers, from the electronics industry have pointed out to us that while the cost-effectiveness approach is useful in planning auto production, where a saving of a few dollars per car gains millions, it is sometimes counter-productive to management of advanced technology where savings depend primarily on the effective use of high priced professionals and where there are far fewer items produced (e.g. computers and F-111s).



were among the first who argued that it was necessary to build up the technological capacity for limited "brush-fire" war. The Vietnam war seemed tailor-made for their strategical approach, and thus accelerated the ascendancy of the new-type of national security manager.

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The game character is a person who lacks a strong center. He comes alive most in his role on the team. He is "turned on" less by inner forces than by the excitement and tensions of the big game, of competing with others for power and position. He enjoys high-risk play, keeping alive in shark-infested bureaucratic waters. One top level manager told us that those who made it to the top were the ones who work best under the highest pressure, like pro-football quarterbacks. Indeed, this type of national security manager is like a <sup>pro-</sup>quarterback in terms of his institutional role. He is likely to run project-teams, taking orders from a higher up coach and then executing plays with subordinates.

It is relevant to note here that Richard Nixon has many traits of the game character. He has made it clear that he needs conflict and competition to feel fully vital. He ran for Governor in 1962 because he could not stand being out of the game. After his defeat for Governor of California he explained his move to New York as follows:

"New York is very cold and very ruthless and very exciting, and, therefore, an interesting place to live. It has many disadvantages but also many advantages. The main thing, it is a place where you can't slow down -- a fast track. Any person tends to vegetate unless he is moving on a fast track. New York is a very challenging place to live. You have to bone up to keep alive in the competition here."

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<sup>1</sup> Earl Mazo and Stephen Hess, Nixon: A Political Portrait (Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1968), p. 285.

I owe this quote to Professor J. David Barber of Yale University who has done considerable research on the personality of President Nixon.



Nixon is energized by this kind of struggle, and his self-esteem rests on being a winner. Like many managerial game characters, Nixon loves football, a sport which symbolizes the game character in the megamachine. He even journeyed to Texas to present a plaque to the national collegiate champions. The game is for him the ritual that expresses that aspect of American character which he believes has given him his mandate. It is noteworthy that in the key speech defending his Vietnam policy, (November 3, 1969) Nixon condemned those who advocate getting out now as "losers" and appealed to the American public to defend their position -- or illusion -- of winners.

### Character and Structure

The game character fits into the project-oriented environment of advanced technology where the goal is continual innovation. It is a meritocratic world <sup>of "fair play"</sup> in which position is no longer based merely on background and belonging to the ruling class, but also on technical skill and intellectual brightness. It requires men who can work in teams and are not dependent on authorities to direct their day-by-day work. These men must be more democratic, self-directed, and active than the old-style bureaucrat.

Typically, as Richard Barnet has shown, the first modern national security managers, like Dean Acheson, the brothers Dulles, Robert Lovett, or John McCloy came from elite backgrounds. They were educated at private schools, at the Harvard,



Yale, or Princeton of final clubs and then in upperclass firms or established banking houses. Their identity and self-esteem rested on their background and feeling of belonging to the ruling class, as well as on their achievement. They never felt like "nobodies". They were raised to be leaders, to consider themselves better prepared than others by breeding, education and character to determine the fate of the nation. They felt more at home in the world than most people, since typically they travelled to Europe from childhood on, knew French and perhaps other foreign languages. Besides money, they also were connected through family, friends, or business with members of the ruling class in other countries. Typically, they were Episcopalians of English descent. While such upper class managers spoke the rhetoric of democracy, their conduct was in large part governed by the values of aristocratic individualism and long-term privileged interests. Today, such individuals need more than the right background even to be admitted to Harvard or Yale, and must compete with new men who are considered better fitted to direct a technological society.

Many of the new national security managers have risen to the top without the benefits of the upper class. Particularly, like Robert McNamara or David Packard and a few military leaders they have reached the top in part because of their ability to move freely in the world of high technology. Some are Irish Catholics with backgrounds in the Air Force. Some are Jewish economists, of Russian-Polish rather than German origin. Some are Texas engineers from small towns. They were attracted to technology not only because of their mathematical and engineering



talents, but also because they saw it was one of the few roads to the top of the meritocracy. While the old-style manager gained promotion and power as a result of waiting patiently and elegantly to be "tapped" for membership in the club, the gamester feels he will make the team only by hustling -- in both senses. He must show hustle in thinking up new programs, adding new ideas, or developing those of his superiors. Also, he may need to hustle in the sense of selling himself to his bosses, showing that he has the right spirit, that he is a good team player, etc.

The fit between structure and character was described to us in a number of interviews with middle level Pentagon managers who were in the business of developing new programs for the war in Vietnam.

The typical work day of the top Pentagon leaders demands a game-playing mind which can be quickly turned off and on according to rapidly changing requirements. The atmosphere is one of continual crisis and constant anxiety. The game players heat up the atmosphere, trying to get others to accept their newest plans or gimmicks.

Everyone is hustling to improve his position. No one stays on any particular problem very long. One manager stated that a real crisis is in a way a relief. Not only does the anxiety now feel more rational, but also for a while the manager can direct his attention exclusively to one problem.

The gamester tends to be frustrated and bored by the old-style bureaucratic hierarchy with its orderly processes. The challenge of new problems engages him and as we suggest, may take his mind away



from gnawing anxiety. As one upper-middle rank Pentagon official stated, "Fun is really the big word, just more fun. You want the telephone to ring, to be called to the next meeting, to see the guy one step up and then the secretary. It's a great big game and we had lots of fun. It attracted all the bright guys. There was lots of action and you could show your stuff."

In such an atmosphere, the quick tongued and sharp-witted get ahead. Many people who in a more traditional setting might impress by their ability to work by themselves and think through problems at length, would not make the new team.

Furthermore, on the new team with its atmosphere of joking and one-upsmanship the reserved type of person as well as the person with deep convictions are likely to feel out of place. In the traditional bureaucracy, the gamester might have been frowned on as an inside dopester, a hustler who lacked dignity, self-control and seriousness.

In understanding the significance of the game character to the formulation of military policy, it needs to be emphasized that the world of advanced technology, particularly in the areas of electronics, computers, and information processing has developed in such a way as to require this type of person, since he can manage innovative projects and individuals. He has replaced those who could not carry out these organizational requirements. Man may be adaptive to a great extent, but there are limits to the flexibility of any character. Changing social conditions can pull the



rug from under a social character that seemed to be solidly grounded. Individuals who in the old system were well adapted, whose emotions fit the requirements of the system, become confused and frustrated in the new anti-bureaucratic bureaucracy. Their spontaneous feelings -- on which important decisions are based-- can no longer be trusted. For example, the wait-and-see attitude, the disdain for the overly bright young man, contempt for the parvenue, and distrust of new technology,-- these "feelings" all serve them poorly in the new National Security State, although they might have insured success in the past. The men who rejected Billy Mitchell's vision of airpower and more recently Hyman Rickover's drive to develop military technologies now find themselves in the backwash of history, replaced by the new men with the emotional attitudes which fit the organizational requirements.

However, the new character type suffers from the opposite problem. He is likely to favor any project that is new and "technically exciting". While the upper-class manager tended to protect the identity he had inherited and the long-term global interests of his class, the new type appears more alienated from himself and the world, without roots or a strong sense of self. His relatedness is essentially to the team, and the struggle to be a winner determines his identity. As a result, his inner life and the people who are affected by his decisions are much less real to him, particularly while he is in the game. Indeed, he can only be democratic and self-





directed because he works within such narrow limits, detached from larger moral issues.

Thus, many -- although by no means all -- technical managers are able to dedicate the same energy and initiative to whatever project they are in, without taking account of its human implications. What effect does it have on an individual to design programs for destruction rather than goods for human consumption? What is the result of measuring cost effectiveness in terms of death and destruction rather than in terms of sales and benefits?

### Character and Violence

Can an individual truly detach himself from his destructive behavior?

It appears that the national security managers tried to do so. As Barnett points out, they attempted to neutralize the emotional side of violence, making violent actions into normal everyday "plays" in the game. Orders to destroy, Barnett points out, were included in lists requesting other, more benign actions, as though there were no difference. Technological terminology was also employed to minimize the reality of destructiveness. The "surgical strike", "cleaning out" the area, "wasting the enemy" are terms that alienate the individual from the reality of killing. Technology plays an important role in this process, because it separates the individual from the experience. The individuals planning "project ranchhand" or the others were emotionally far removed from the experiences they were causing. Even the pilots flying high over the countryside were often able to maintain



a detachment from their actions and the consequences; their minds and the bombs were in different places.

To give an example of this, Stewart Meacham, peace secretary of the AFSC, told the following story. He went to Hanoi and brought home U.S. prisoners of war who had been released by the North Vietnamese. One U.S. pilot described how he had been captured. He had been bombing in populated areas and was hit by anti-aircraft fire. He bailed out and soon after landing was captured by a young Vietnamese woman <sup>who had</sup> a rifle. She led him through a village, but at one point, she stumbled, fell, and dropped the rifle. The pilot picked it up and handed it back to her. Meacham was puzzled by the story. Why hadn't the pilot escaped? He answered that the woman would have called others. Why didn't he shoot the woman? The pilot was shocked at the suggestion that he might have shot an unarmed woman and added that children were nearby who might have been hit by his rifle fire.

This example suggests that technology allows individuals to commit acts that normally they would not perform, as long as the individual does not experience his act as destructive. It would seem also that non-destructive individuals can fight without being especially dehumanized, when they are convinced they are defending their vital interests or acting out of duty.



I am inclined to believe that there are fundamental differences between the professional military and the civilian national security managers in this respect. Some of the military officers have the game character. But on the whole, the military professionals are more traditional, oriented to service, duty, and patriotic values than managers from industry, law and banking. While he may be less self-directed than the technical manager, the military officer tends to be less materialistic, for the service pays poorly in relation to other comparable managerial positions. Some officers crave power over men, while others seem to seek security in an organization with many benefits; the latter are more eager to please their superiors, more fearful of independence. However, most are deeply concerned with honor, which rests on acting in accordance with principles, doing one's duty. Ideally, they also wish to advance the interests of their service, and those who do this best are likely to move to the top.

Many of the officers I have interviewed are religious men, who do not separate honor from morality. They consider the war in Vietnam dishonorable and inglorious.

These men tend to have the more traditional character structure. They come from towns or small cities, preponderantly in the South and Midwest. In contrast to bankers, lawyers and even most industrial managers, they are square, fundamentalists. Such men, like the officers who judged Lt. Calley, take seriously the principles of law.

I am also inclined to believe that Lyndon Johnson, while more grandiose, materialistic



and political than these men, shared many of their traits, including the concern about honor. Although there are similarities between Nixon and Johnson, L.B.J. is not a game character. His compulsive need to be first was rooted in the ebullent narcissism and almost feudal authoritarianism that has been written about often. Johnson's character probably contributed to the widening of the war and to the inept way it was carried out.

At the start, Johnson tried to go along with the Kennedy-style gamesters, but such a symbiosis was unlikely to last. L.B.J's. character was too hot, too cornball, too traditional, and too fundamentalist for the game characters to appreciate, while his narcissism demanded constant feeding from people he could feel really admired him. Of all the Kennedy security managers, the ones he ended up with were the visionaries, Rusk and Rostow. At least, their anti-communist fanaticism fit his traditional patriotism, and their dead-pan seriousness held no gnawing threat of ridicule.

Despite L.B.J's. need to feel personal power, even to the point of controlling bombing missions, his character helped make him increasingly powerless. His narcissism made him more likely to accept favorable reports and to believe the illusion that he was controlling the uncontrollable. (In contrast, the game character does not get angry at negative feed-back; no-gain or even a passer tackled behind the line can energize him to come up with a new play.) L.B.J's. Texas-style patriotism, combined with political fears about "losing" S.E. Asia, kept him from seriously considering any



alternative to victory. And his authoritarianism made him contemptuous about non-Westerners in other cultures and led him to overvalue military force.

It would seem that war can be carried out by highly controlled individuals who are not particularly destructive and who act in terms of duty and honor; furthermore, that destructive policies and programs can be planned and executed by rather alienated technocrats who are only trying to make the team and further their own ambitions.

This does not imply, however, that the war-making structures do not attract some extremely destructive people. There is evidence to suggest that some of the functionaries who are most destructive may be people who seem at first glance to be neither sadistic nor particularly tough.

Hannah Arendt has argued that bland, alienated and ambitious functionaries in a destructive bureaucracy can cause as much or more evil than any sadist who relished his power to inflict pain. This appears to be correct only in part. It is true that the mechanized organization is disturbed by individualists. It runs most smoothly when the individual workers are most like parts in a machine.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In highly technological corporations, some more individualistic innovators ("entrepreneurial types" as they are called) are needed to keep the organization productive. Such managers nearly always produce polarization and conflict. A company can't afford many of them.

There is increasingly an attempt to give people the illusion of independence while they are in fact becoming parts of the machine. The most dramatic symbol of this illusion is that of the astronauts. The astronauts are perhaps one of the closest historical approximations to highly programmed human parts of a machine. Their real freedom at work is minimal. They are as interchangeable as people can be doing highly complicated work. Unlike men on an assembly line or slaves working on the pyramids, they are part of a cybernated machine. However, it is an illusion to compare them to the highly independent Renaissance explorers, such as Columbus or Cortez.



The most effective managers have the character structure that fits them to their role in the organization, and we have argued that such people may be relatively indifferent to the consequences of their acts. However, actually some such managers may be gratified by the destruction they cause. Arendt's mistake was to incorrectly classify one such person, Adolph Eichmann, as merely a rather banal petty power seeker who "never realized what he was doing."<sup>1</sup> The evil, as she sees it, came from his "remoteness from reality" and "thoughtlessness" in carrying out orders.

Quite a different picture of a destructive, but not necessarily sadistic killer emerges from the depth psychological studies of Eichmann carried out while he was in an Israeli prison. The results of these tests and interviews have been reported by I.S. Kulcsar, Shoshanna Kulcsar, and Lipot Szondi who reach the conclusion that 'E. was not an anti-semite. E. Was an addict-killer. He killed Poles, Russians, and even German communists with the same satisfaction as Jews. He hated humanity."<sup>2</sup> Yet, how is it that he seemed so bland and banal? The answer is by no means simple. It requires the psychoanalytic concept of necrophilia, which is one

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, Eichman in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (Viking Press, New York, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Szondi analyzed Eichman's test response on the Szondi test blindly, i.e. he was not told beforehand the subject's name. Yet, he concluded that the man had the character of Cain. He wrote, "We arrive at the conclusion: this man is a criminal with an insatiable killing intention. His public danger is still increased by the autistic power ego and the tendency to projection." I.S. Kulcsar, Shoshanna Kulcsar, and Lipo Szondi, "Adolf Eichmann and the Third Reich", in Crime, Law and Corrections, ed. by Ralph Slovenko (Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Springfield, Illinois, 1966), p.47.



of Erich Fromm's most original contributions to understanding the psychopathology of 20th century industrial-bureaucratic society.

Fromm contrasts necrophilia to all other forms of destructiveness in terms of its motivation in character. There is the violence of an otherwise non-destructive individual who defends his life or vital interests. There is the passionate violence of the sadist who experiences pleasure in expressing his domination and control of other people. The sadist seeks the pleasure of power, to achieve, like the Marquis de Sade, the illusion of becoming a demi-god. Indeed, many sadists are too individualistic and pleasure-loving to fit into bureaucracies. In contrast, the person with necrophilic tendencies can find a place in a destructive system where his emotions are in tune with what needs to be done.

The analysis of character and the national security structure must come to grips with the problem of anti-life tendencies. This is not to say that any of the national security managers are necrophilics. Rather, as we shall argue, the structures and policies of war tend to reinforce anti-life tendencies, and they increase the danger that necrophilic attitudes will determine the future.

### The Problem of Necrophilia

Hatred of life and love of death is the ultimate perversion. All humanistic concepts of health include love of life. The individual who loves life respects what is alive and is attracted to that which grows, which has its own structure and



rhythm. (Of course, such a person does not hide from death, since death is a part of life, but rather is attracted to what is alive, and deeply saddened by death.) The essential difference between the biophilic and necrophilic is that the life-loving (biophilic) individual tries to imitate the God who breathed life into clay, by creating and stimulating others through knowledge and disciplined love. The opposite pole to this is the necrophilic whose goal is to take the life from the living, leaving dirt and ashes. The necrophilic tries to transcend his awkwardness, powerlessness, ignorance, and vulnerability by acquiring the power to kill. If he can control, he does not need to understand. He is attracted to a world in which he no longer fears death since in this necrophilic environment there is no life to contrast with non-life. In a shadowy realm where all is mechanized and people are like robots he feels secure, unthreatened, and in command. He hates all that he cannot control, because

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it threatens his solution.<sup>1</sup> Many individuals with necrophilic tendencies tend to be attracted to advanced technology not because it can improve the quality of life but because it can be used to dehumanize the world and to kill more efficiently.

Those with an orientation against life are often unconscious of their goals, although the truth may appear in the symbolic language of their dreams. The extreme necrophilics like Hitler and Eichmann often rationalize their love of evil and worship of death in terms of idols such as efficiency, order, and technology. As long as their religion gains adherents, they do indeed feel like Gods. However, when they are defeated and their illusion is dissolved, they collapse. Like Eichmann, they shrivel up and show not a shread of self-esteem or dignity. It is as though at the core, they feel like the dirt that lacks the divine spirit. Like Hitler, they may commit suicide.

When Freud observed the dark impulses that were expressed in World War I, he concluded that there is an innate instinct to destroy in man and that this death instinct can be held in check only by its opposite, eros. Fromm, accepting Freud's observations, has added to them, but proposed an alternative explanation, that the passion to destroy is not instinctual but rather a potential in man. This potential

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<sup>1</sup>For a fuller description of necrophilia, see Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man (Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1964), and the forthcoming The Causes of Human Destructiveness.



tends to be strengthened or weakened by the circumstances of life, from childhood on. When a child is loved, the potential becomes weak; where he is neglected or expected to behave like a machine, it will become stronger. Even in adults, the anti-life orientation can be reinforced when the individual is numbed by fear or by dehumanizing work.<sup>1</sup>

In our society, <sup>as in others,</sup> most people have both life-loving and anti-life tendencies.

A relatively small percentage, probably no more than 12% are extremely necrophilic.<sup>2</sup>

However, throughout the history of this country, Americans have struggled against necrophilic tendencies in the national character. This can be seen most dramatically in the work of novelists such as Melville, Poe, Hemmingway, Faulkner, and Mailer.

Anti-life tendencies in the American character are rooted in the combination of Puritanism and manifest destiny, in racism and the urge toward "nation-building" at the expense of indigenous tribesmen who lived in much greater harmony with nature than did those who came to "civilize" them. In opposition to these impulses, life-loving tendencies are expressed in utopian hopes and projects, in the works of Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, as well as in the activities of pacifists and most recently in the lives of many individuals who are trying to develop a biophilic mode of life and work.

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<sup>1</sup>See the work of Robert J. Lifton on "psychic numbing".

<sup>2</sup>With the help of Rolando Weissmann, for the past five years, I have been studying the prevalence of necrophilia in the U.S. using interpretative questionnaires. This study is reported in an unpublished manuscript, "Emotional Attitudes and ~~the Future~~ <sup>Poli...</sup>".



The war and the development of the national security state, motivated by fear, fanatical anti-communism, self-serving, and hunger for glory -- reinforced the anti-life orientation. The desire to remake the world according to abstract principles (nation-building) combined with a technology of destruction resulted in people considering necrophilic proposals as though they were reasonable, rather than with shock and horror. The following, taken from the Congressional Record, expresses emotional attitudes symptomatic of an anti-life orientation.

These developments open up some-very exciting horizons as to what we can do in five to ten years from now: when one realizes that we can detect anything that perspires, moves, carries metal, makes a noise, or is hotter or colder than its surroundings, one begins to see the potential. This is the beginning of the instrumentation of the entire battlefield. Eventually we will be able to tell when anybody shoots, what he is shooting at, and where he was shooting from. You begin to get a "year 2000" vision of the electronic map with little lights that flash for different kinds of activity. Leonard Sullivan, Deputy Director for Southeast Asia Matters, Office of Defense Research and Engineering, Congressional Record, Vol. 115, #136, (August 11, 1969), p. S59593.

The careful reader will become sensitive to the language of necrophilia, in which electronic killing is "exciting". In this language, people need to be "revved up" like machines for action and a value is placed on "clean" or "surgical" "extermination".

Were the men who made the war necrophilic? Most of them were not particularly so; nor were they very life-loving. Men who seek power are not notably biophilic. In the case of many game characters, the structures -- the nature of the game, as it were -- was the main determiner of their conduct. But their detachment, their unrelatedness, kept them from responding fully to the reality of evil. They needed to win, and thus could be utilized in specialized



roles within a death machine. Lacking a goal beyond their own success, many game players like Hans Speer in Nazi Germany, are attracted to men like Hitler whose goals are transcendent, though demonic.<sup>1</sup> The same manager who might put all of his energy and brilliance toward designing a new automated factory or transportation system can be put to work on destroying the Vietnamese as long as he treats himself as a game player. In the process, it is inevitable that his heart becomes hardened, and he is less able to reject an insane necrophilic vision of a totally controlled, "ordered" world. The characterological cement of totalitarianism may be the necrophilic allied with the game character. Speer went along with Hitler enthusiastically until it became clear that his hero was a loser, and that Hitler preferred total destruction to powerless surrender. Only then did Speer disobey and allow himself to "see" that he had allied himself with evil.

#### Social Character and the Future

At the same time that the policies of this country moved toward death there has been a counter-reaction in the direction of life. On the whole, the policies of militant anti-communism, nation-building, and unbridled technological development are being rejected. The extremists' policies did not prevail because they clashed with reality and reason. The ideology needed for "nation building"

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Speer, Inside the Third Reich (Mac Millan, New York, 1970).



and perpetual war was too necrophilic for most Americans to accept. Today, even the concern to be "number one" is increasingly questioned. Furthermore, young people are rejecting authoritarian structures and increasingly demanding to know the "reason" behind policies and structures.

If this new consciousness develops, history may relate that the past decade was the time when America teetered on the brink, but turned back toward life. That would mean a commitment to the humanization of American society, to the restructuring of institutions of government and industry. Such a task requires a struggle in which we are sensitive to our own emotional attitudes and those of our leaders, and reject the visions of those people with frozen faces and mechanical voices or smiles who try to mesmerize Americans. An awareness of character would make us trust least those without compassion whatever their ideology; and trust most those with humility, patience and a vision that leaves room for people, including non-Americans to determine their own goals.

Sensitivity to character can be crucial in judging candidates for high office, particularly the presidency. Many Americans seem to believe that if a presidential candidate is not a compulsive winner, he does not deserve serious consideration. In 1968, Eugene McCarthy was criticized by many intellectuals as not being concerned enough about winning. They did not stop to think that it is precisely the individual whose self concept is not based on winning who might be willing to "lose" the Indochina war or to face set-backs maturely, putting human considerations ahead of the will to win.



Despite the turmoil of the past decade, it has not been easy for many  
of these  
Americans to give up the national illusions. Foremost is the equation of progress  
with winning games. In fact, the need to be a winner has dulled conscience and  
good judgment. It has made us all losers and alienated us from ourselves and  
the world. The illusions of glory and American superiority must be dissolved,  
if we are to create a sane society.

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