

17 OCT. 1971

Approved For Release 2004/10/13 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200260003-3

P-Martin, Edwin  
Austin, Anthony  
SOC. 4.01.2 The Presidents  
War

# The Tonkin Gulf Resolution— One Clear Meaning

## BOOKS

THE PRESIDENT'S WAR, by  
Anthony Austin. (Lippincott:  
\$7.50.)

Reviewed by  
EDWIN MARTIN

A million or so Americans plunked down \$2.25 for a copy of the Bantam Books edition of "The Pentagon Papers" last July following the Supreme Court decision clearing the information for publication.

It would be interesting to know how many of them managed to wade through the 677 pages to the very end. I suspect that many gave up after looking at the photos, turned off by the deadly combination of New York Times editorial prose and Pentagon bureaucratise.

Anthony Austin's book would suit these readers. He is the assistant editor of The Week In Review section of the New York Times, but he has not been influenced in writing style by the editorialists. His account of the nation's involvement in Vietnam is briskly written, and authoritative. The narrative format helps a reader follow the twists and turns of United States policy which finally led to an incumbent President's being forced to abandon the White House.

Austin focuses on the passage by Congress of the notorious Gulf of Tonkin resolution, the document former President Lyndon B. Johnson took as his authority to accelerate the war.

It has all been fuzzed over now, but the truth is Mr. Johnson was given that authority and all the protests of Sen. J. William Fulbright and other recanters will not wash out the fact.

Fulbright claims today that he was hoodwinked into leading the Senate debate in favor of passing the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. Well, the resolution was

plainly worded, and while Mr. Johnson was often accused of being an illiterate Texan during his term in the White House, he really can read.

In case anyone has forgotten, the Gulf of Tonkin resolution said the following: "Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and

to prevent further aggression...the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps including the use of armed force, to assist any member of protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requiring assistance in defense of its freedom."

That's what the resolution said, folks, and it does not take a mental giant to explain its meaning. The authority was there—"all necessary measures to repel any armed attack" and "all necessary steps including the use of armed force"—although Sen. Fulbright now contends that it meant something else entirely. That's hogwash.

Austin quotes former Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach as telling Sen. Fulbright that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was a "functional equivalent" of a declaration of war, which it was.

The line now taken by Sen. Fulbright also is quoted by Austin. It goes something like this: the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was passed by the Senate (or at least Fulbright, McGovern, Church, et al) thought they were merely voting for a document which was a state-

ment of national unity and resolve requested by the President for its cautionary effect on the Communist adversary following the attack on the American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin in August, 1964. If Sen. Fulbright got that meaning out of the words of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, it makes one wonder how he got that degree from Oxford.

The hero in the Senate in those fateful days of 1964 was the waspish Sen. Wayne Morse of Oregon, who with Sen. Gruening of Alaska cast the only negative votes against the Tonkin resolution.

Sen. Morse saw clearly what the resolution was. Others did, too, notably Sen. Frank Church of Idaho. But Church didn't have the sand to stand up against Mr. Johnson. Morse did. In a long, bitter speech, he reminded his colleagues that a constitutional principle was involved.

"It is dangerous to give to any President an unchecked power, after the passage of a joint resolution, to make war," Morse said. "I believe that future generations will look with dismay upon a Congress which is now about to make such a historic mistake."

The payment Morse received for his prescience was defeat at the polls; Fulbright and Church and the others were re-elected. What a commentary on the intelligence of voters. A man who saw unerringly into the future and had the courage to stand by his analysis was sent back to his Maryland cattle farm by voters.

That is another irony of the Vietnam War period, one of many. (My own favorite is that the destroyer C. Turner Joy, one of two attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin, was named after the tough Navy admiral who stood up to the Communists in the

truce talks which closed the Korean War, the conflict that was supposed to show the U. S. the futility of fighting Asians on their terms).

Another irony is that Austin's book, a lucid presentation of the facts before, during and after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, will doubtlessly have a miniscule sale compared to the almost unreadable "Pentagon Papers."

That's too bad, too. For Austin's central point is that Vietnam occurred because of an erosion of congressional authority, largely self-imposed, and a dangerous concomitant growth of presidential power in making war. That imbalance, never intended by the Founding Fathers, still exists despite Vietnam.

It would pay all of us to know as much as we can about how Senators and Representatives can abdicate responsibility in a time of crisis (and how they can alibi their failure) and how a well meaning chief executive can stumble into a morass like Vietnam.

Austin's book illuminates this issue; the "Pentagon Papers" merely confuse.

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