

Robert McNamara: a simple Aristotelian, underneath

by Daniel Platt

Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara

by Deborah Shapley

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Deborah Shapley has gone to great lengths to convey the impression that she has produced a ponderous, scholarly tome, a definitive assessment of Robert Strange McNamara's role in history. However, the reader can search through all the 615 pages of this opus, and never find any discussion of the invariant feature of McNamara's career: He used each position of power that he held to implement Bertrand Russell's prescription for a dual-empire, feudal world order, where scientific and technological progress is suppressed, and human population reduced. There has been an inexorable logical consistency in McNamara's efforts, ranging from his early attempts to block a new generation of technology (with inevitable economic spin-offs) associated with strategic defense, to his conduct of a meat-grinder "population war" in Vietnam, to the broader, more ambitious "population war" he ran as the head of the World Bank. To bring about the imagined stability of a malthusian world, the world must be kept backward, and people must suffer and die. It is this ideology that connects the disparate episodes in the life of Robert Strange McNamara, and it is never honestly confront-

ed anywhere in Shapley's book.

Shapley examines, critically and in exhaustive detail, some of the shopworn controversies surrounding McNamara's career, in order to have the last word on issues such as whether he was responsible for the Edsel (he was not), or whether he lied in his public statements about the Vietnam War (yes and no, and it depends on how you assess the circumstances). Yet on some of the real lollapaloozas, ideas championed by McNamara that had the potential for changing history decisively for the worse, she proceeds as if there were no controversy at all. Shapley states, "He had the insight to develop the policy of Assured Destruction, which stabilized the U.S.-Soviet nuclear relationship for a generation." She is so anxious to avoid controversy on this point, that throughout the book she avoids the more common name for this policy, Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), possibly because she is uncomfortable with the acronym. In fact, this concept did not originate with McNamara—we will discuss its genesis later.

Strategic MADness

Elsewhere, Shapley states: "Assured Destruction would remain the centerpiece of U.S. policy for a generation—and was ultimately adopted in some form by the Soviets—because it expressed an underlying truth of the nuclear age. Not only did it give Pentagon managers useful yardsticks for measuring the effects of various proposed additions to U.S. forces, changes in Soviet forces, and the shifting balance between them. It also showed that Robert McNamara, often derided for lacking human insight, had hit on a basic emotion-

al and political truth.”

Here Shapley reveals herself to be a True Believer, as evidenced by one colossal lapse of scholarship. No one who had a passing familiarity with the published writings of Marshal V. D. Sokolovskii and Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov could allow himself or herself to assert that MAD was “ultimately adopted in some form by the Soviets.” This is pure wishful thinking. In attempting to dismiss the utility of strategic defense, she writes that “for every dollar the United States spent defending itself from nuclear destruction, the enemy could neutralize that effort by spending only about one-third of a dollar in additional offense. . . . It was a critical fact of life, given the state of technology both in the 1960s and for 30 years after, even in the era of Star Wars.” In fact, as Marshal Sokolovskii noted in the first edition of *Soviet Military Strategy*, published in 1962, the advent of directed energy technologies proves the converse to be true.

Ironically, the closest brush with reality that one finds on this issue in Shapley’s book, is a quote from Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin. Responding to a lunchtime lecture from McNamara on the dangers of antiballistic missiles (ABMs) during the 1967 Glassboro meeting with President Lyndon Johnson, Kosygin said, “When I have trouble sleeping at night, it’s because of your offensive missiles, not your defensive missiles.”

Another assertion that ought to astonish the reader comes later, in the discussion of McNamara’s role as president of the World Bank: “McNamara’s early stress on the population problem did not stem just from inner gloom or his obsession with numbers. He had indeed found the single most important factor in the ill-understood economics of the developing world. He grasped that only if these societies attacked population growth (necessarily in keeping with their mores and religious customs) could the specter of advancing poverty be kept at bay.” Unfortunately, only *EIR*, of all the publications available to the American reader, has rigorously refuted the malthusian dogma. From Shapley’s generation forward, malthusianism has become an article of faith.

In the arena of Big Ideas, Shapley is a committed adherent to McNamara’s views. This is somewhat camouflaged, however, because she expends so many pages analyzing his faults, particularly in his conduct of the Vietnam War. She leaves no stone unturned in examining the wretched consequences of the famed “body count” approach. A quote from her personal interviews of McNamara corroborates *EIR*’s characterization of U. S. tactics as “cabinet warfare”: “I did not believe it was likely we could win a military victory. I did believe that the military action should be used as a prod towards moving to a political track: to increase the chance of initiating movement on the political track.” While emphasizing that McNamara’s approach diverged from classical military philosophy, Shapley provides no discussion of the classical philosophy itself, which would be necessary to illuminate the actual clash of ideas, and the true depth of the destructive-

ness of McNamara’s method. This applies not only to the question of Vietnam, where she is critical, but also on the topic of strategic doctrine, where she wholly approves.

Aristotelianism, bean-counting, and Harvard

The thesis that Shapley defends, is that McNamara was essentially a visionary who embraced lofty, noble, and humanitarian goals, but whose methodology was crippled by his obsessive commitment to systems analysis and “bean-counting,” i.e., the compulsive quantification of any process. She traces the development of this malady from his courses at Harvard Business School in what is variously termed financial control, management control, statistical control, or control accounting. She describes how later, as an instructor at Harvard in accounting, he joined a group of his colleagues who adroitly maneuvered themselves out of the World War II draft and into overseas commissions with the rank of U.S. Army captains, because of their training in the growing field of bean-counting. McNamara was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel with no combat experience (he was later destined to make many officers in his own image). He and some of his team members then parlayed their wartime bean-counting prowess into management jobs at Ford Motor Co., where McNamara ascended to power. He successively ran the Ford Motor Co., the Department of Defense, and the World Bank.

So, Shapley depicts McNamara as a man whose drive to realize magnanimous ideals is compromised by his obsessive-compulsive accountant’s approach to problem solving. In fact, McNamara’s problem has a name: It is Aristotelianism, and it is not merely a mistaken method, but a devastating epistemological disease. And Shapley is dishonestly concealing one whole side of the Aristotelian personality.

Lyndon LaRouche, in his published writings on epistemology and psychology, has rigorously developed the concept that an attempt to understand the universe by the Aristotelian methods of dividing phenomena into static categories, catalogues of “facts,” and demanding that every process conform to a linear algebraic function, is fundamentally irrational and leads inexorably to the kookiest manifestations of irrationality. No one should be surprised, for example, that years after the death of the famous Aristotelian Sir Isaac Newton (whose dime-store mechanical universe is still sold throughout the world), his personal papers revealed him to be predominantly occupied with dabbling in the occult. By the same token, in 1963, when McNamara was secretary of defense, articles by Edith Kermit Roosevelt appeared in New Hampshire’s *Manchester Union Leader*, describing McNamara’s participation in ritual “bathing in the full moon” on Roosevelt Island along the Potomac River. McNamara is a member of the Lucis Trust (originally named the Lucifer Trust), the preeminent New Age occult organization in America today. There is no mention of these proclivities in Shapley’s biography, but an insightful investigator of McNamara’s

mara's number-fixation *should expect to find them*. Scratch a bean-counter, find a moon-bather.

Because of her allegiance to much of McNamara's philosophy, it may be that Shapley wishes to suppress discussion of those activities which highlight his MADness. She does, however, provide one useful lead. She recounts how, when he took over the World Bank, he began travelling the world as part of an inseparable trio comprised of himself, his wife Margy, and a British assistant named William Clark, who "made no secret of being a homosexual." Shapley treats this arrangement rather gingerly (in contrast to her gratuitous and gossipy discussion of McNamara's relationship with Joan Braden, wife of columnist Tom Braden), but one item does come to light:

"In fact, McNamara found his way to some of his ideas through William Clark's address book. Clark was part of a group in Britain that had been angered by the way London acted toward its colonies ever since India and Pakistan won independence with the help of Lord Mountbatten in 1947. This group in a sense launched the concept of development; its political philosophy reached back to the Fabian Society of Beatrice and Sidney Webb. The Fabians sought to use government as an equalizer of wealth in Great Britain. However, since the new governments in the former colonies were not ready for such roles, the Fabians turned to outside programs that would develop the new nations more equitably."

The Fabians were, in fact, *opposed* to development, preferring the redistribution of existing wealth to the creation of additional wealth. This premise was integral to the Great Society programs of Lyndon Johnson, and Shapley accurately observes that McNamara wished to use the World Bank to bring the Great Society to the Third World. What is most interesting about the above paragraph, however, is the observation that "new governments were not ready for such roles, [so] the Fabians turned to outside programs." The World Bank became one such "outside program" to override national sovereignty and impose the Fabian model.

McNamara's introduction to Clark's clique could not have been his first contact with the ideas of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. It was the Fabian circles, and particularly the Webbs' colleague Bertrand Russell, who initiated the World Association of Parliamentarians for World Government, whose London conference in 1955 led in turn to the Pugwash Conferences. The Pugwash Conferences were a "back-channel" arrangement where the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets came to discuss certain principles of power-sharing, including a sort of "gentleman's agreement" about when and how nuclear weapons ought to be used. The second Pugwash Conference, held in Quebec in 1958, featured a keynote address by Dr. Leo Szilard, which put forth a fully elaborated statement of the Nuclear Deterrence and Flexible Response doctrines later adopted by McNamara as secretary of defense.

Russell and the Fabians cherished the belief that the terri-

fying power of nuclear weapons could provide the inducement for nations to surrender their sovereignty and accede to world government. In an influential article, published in the October 1946 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Russell wrote: "If the atomic bomb shocks the nations into acquiescence in a system making great wars impossible, it will have been one of the greatest boons ever conferred by science." This coheres with the Fabian view that sovereign nations were unlikely to embrace the Fabians' peculiar notion of "development," and that therefore it were desirable to have "outside programs" to impose it.

Displaying a flair for euphemism, Shapley describes the inception of the Bretton Woods agreement, which created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF): "The idea's evolution reflected the disposition of power during the era: the Americans made the basic proposal, which was imaginatively elaborated on by [John Maynard] Keynes and his British party as they crossed the Atlantic aboard the Queen Mary en route to the meeting." These financial institutions were to become the essential "outside programs," trampling on sovereignty and imposing misery throughout the globe. When McNamara took over the World Bank, he dramatically increased that institution's malthusian bias.

Blueprint for extinction

As an indication of the extremes to which McNamara's clinical Aristotelianism can carry him, he presented the following formula in a 1991 lecture to the United Nations on population:

$$ED = p \times c \times d$$

where *ED* represents environmental damage; *p* population growth; *c* consumption; and *d* represents a factor for the rate at which people exploit resources. Shapley, who was present during the address, gives a rather unsatisfactory explanation for the meaning of *d*, but it seems likely that McNamara intended it to be a factor for energy flux-density, since Shapley says it refers to the higher rates of resource consumption by "richer people." *Ergo*, the Aristotelian, who regards the world and its resources as static and fixed, is forced to conclude that to protect the environment, we must have fewer people who consume fewer resources at lower rates of efficiency. As *EIR* and other publications of the LaRouche movement have continually demonstrated, this prescription leads without fail to the extinction of the human species.

At the time McNamara's speech was delivered, he remarked to Deborah Shapley that his formula was "as important as Einstein's $E=mc^2$." One is tempted to discover a hint of condescension when William P. Bundy, a representative of the oligarchy which McNamara has loyally served, is quoted in the book's introduction, saying, "He's a rather simple man, underneath."