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## HISTORIOGRAPHY

### The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War

GARY R. HESS\*

The burgeoning literature on the Vietnam War testifies to its status as a defining event in American history. The early availability of a considerable body of documentation on U.S. policymaking in Washington and warmaking in Vietnam, together with the intensity of controversies stirred by the war, help to account for this extensive writing. The duration of the war and its antecedents—a thirty-year process between Ho Chi Minh's 1945 assertion of independence in the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh campaign of 1975 that reunified the country—make this a lengthy story and one being told more in fragments than in its entirety. Hence, while much early scholarship was devoted to American policy and actions in World War II and the early Cold War, the more recent focus has moved to subsequent developments, with considerable attention to the administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson. Most scholarship has been devoted to the American side, but the emerging literature includes a number of important efforts to see the conflict from Vietnamese perspectives and to set it in an international context. This essay explores the development of the principal interpretive issues in an emerging Vietnam War historiography with a focus on the literature that has appeared in the last dozen years.<sup>1</sup>

\*I would like to thank Brian Cassidy of the University of Hawaii for research assistance.

<sup>1</sup>There are numerous assessments of the literature on Vietnam. Among the more recent are: David L. Anderson, "Why Vietnam? Postrevisionist Answers and a Neorealist Suggestion," *Diplomatic History* 13 (Summer 1989): 419-29; Warren I. Cohen, "Vietnam: New Light on the Nature of the War," *International History Review* 9 (February 1987): 108-16; Robert A. Divine, "Vietnam Reconsidered," *Diplomatic History* 12 (Winter 1988): 79-93; John M. Gates, "Vietnam: The Debate Goes On," *Parameters* 14 (Spring 1984): 15-24; George C. Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Debate Continues," *American Historical Review* 92 (April 1987): 350-62; idem, "Vietnam Remembered," *Journal of American History* 73 (June 1986): 152-64; Gary R. Hess, "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam [Review of Harry G. Summers's *On Strategy* and Bruce Palmer's *The 25-Year War*]," *Diplomatic History* 10 (Winter 1986): 91-106; Thomas G. Paterson, "Historical Memory and Illusive Victories: Vietnam and Central America," *Diplomatic History* 12 (Winter 1988): 1-18; and Geoffrey S. Smith, "Light at the End

At one time, the Vietnam War seemed easily understandable. While it was being waged, the predominant (orthodox) interpretation saw the United States, driven by a mindless anticommunism and with disregard for Vietnamese politics and culture, being drawn into a conflict that it could not win. The titles of representative orthodox books convey the sense of misguided, if not arrogant, idealism leading to a tragic military intervention: *The Making of a Quagmire*; *Washington Plans an Aggressive War*; *The Abuse of Power*; *The Arrogance of Power*; *The Bitter Heritage*; *The Lost Crusade*.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the administration of Richard M. Nixon was ending U.S. involvement in 1972, the orthodox critique was given its fullest expression in two influential and highly praised books: David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* and Frances FitzGerald's *Fire in the Lake*. Together these works explained the tragedy that Vietnam had by then come to symbolize: Halberstam's devastating portraits of the men brought to power by John F. Kennedy, who embodied the "historical sense of inevitable victory"; and FitzGerald's contention that the war they waged was irrelevant given the forces of Vietnamese history, which assured the triumph of the Communist revolution.<sup>3</sup>

As Halberstam and FitzGerald were providing what seemed to be definitive explanations of the war, the scholarly impact of what quickly became known as the Pentagon Papers was changing the terms of thinking about Vietnam. The controversial publication in 1971 of the massive Department of Defense study of policymaking from 1945 to 1967 gave Americans an unprecedented opportunity to read classified documents about a war while it was still being waged. But it also challenged orthodox assumptions and provided the opening scholarly wedge of revisionism. In early interpretations of the Pentagon Papers, the project's documents and narrative were seen as stripping the veneer of innocence from U.S. policymaking by showing that officials recognized the likelihood that escalatory steps would fail as well as the deceit they engaged in by publicly promising "progress." To Daniel Ellsberg, who had helped to compile the study and then to leak it to the press, the story of the Pentagon Papers was simple: Each president had done the minimum necessary to avoid defeat in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era* (New York, 1964); Ralph L. Stavins, Richard J. Barnet, and Marcus G. Raskin, *Washington Plans an Aggressive War* (New York, 1971); Theodore Draper, *The Abuse of Power* (New York, 1966); Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (Fawcett, CT, 1970); J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York, 1966); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy*, rev. ed. (Greenwich, CT, 1968). The most scholarly of the orthodox works was George McT. Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York, 1967).

Other early works stressed an imperialist imperative leading to the war in Vietnam; these included: Richard J. Barnet, *Roots of War: The Men and Institutions behind U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1972); and Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (Boston, 1969). For contemporary apologies of U.S. policy see: Chester A. Bain, *Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967); and Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam, Nation under Stress* (Boston, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, 1972), 123; Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston, 1972).

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York, 1972).

After publication of the Pentagon Papers, a spate of revisionist-oriented works quickly appeared, principal among them four books published in 1978 and 1979—*The Irony of Vietnam*, by Leslie Gelb with Richard Betts; *Summons of the Trumpet*, by Dave Richard Palmer; *Strategy for Defeat*, by U. S. Grant Sharp; and *America in Vietnam*, by Guenter Lewy.

In *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, Gelb, who had directed the Pentagon Papers project, collaborated with Betts in countering the conventional view that America had blundered into Vietnam. The bureaucratic system "worked" in that policymakers: (1) were consistently aware of the obstacles to U.S. objectives; (2) did the minimum necessary to avoid defeat at each escalatory step; and (3) were successful until losing "the essential domino"—American public support. The Gelb and Betts emphasis on a designed stalemate reinforced the wave of military revisionism that began in earnest with Sharp's *Strategy for Defeat* and Palmer's *Summons of the Trumpet*. These works, and several that followed, reflect the military leadership's long-standing resentment of civilian direction of the war. Sharp, a retired admiral who was Commander in Chief Pacific from 1964 to 1968, and Palmer, a general who served in various command positions in Vietnam, were the first of several high-ranking officers to write revisionist accounts of the war in which they served.

Finally, Lewy's *America in Vietnam*, based in large part on special access to classified documents, offers a scholarly apology for the U.S. effort, stressing the morality of the objective of defending South Vietnam and of the military means employed toward that end. The United States, Lewy asserts, failed to do enough: It should have taken direct control of the South Vietnamese government, incorporated the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) into the U.S. command structure, and enforced the reforms necessary to win peasant support.<sup>5</sup>

In the years following this initial wave of revisionist literature, three main groups of revisionists have emerged: the Clausewitzians, the "hearts-and-minders," and the "legitimacists." Although there are elements of "if only" history in all of these works, it is a central tool for the Clausewitzians, who promise a retrospective prescription for victory. The hearts-and-minders and the legitimacists tend to be more scholarly and less certain that the American effort could have attained its objectives.

The most explicit and best known Clausewitzian statement is provided by Harry Summers's *On Strategy*, which cleverly contrasts U.S. conduct of the war with the classic strategic doctrines set forth in Karl von Clausewitz's *On War*. Summers contends that American political leaders were principally responsible for a strategy that was deficient on every count. Other officers of the Vietnam War have argued along similar lines; their works include *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam*, by Bruce Palmer; *The Rise and Fall of an American Army: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973*,

<sup>5</sup>Leslie H. Gelb, with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, 1978); Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S. Vietnam in Perspective* (Novato, CA, 1978); U. S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael, CA, 1978); Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, 1978).

by Shelby Stanton; and two works by Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975*, and *Secrets of the Vietnam War*.<sup>6</sup>

With varying degrees of intensity and emphasis, Clausewitzian revisionists argue that civilian leaders misunderstood the Vietnam conflict and sent the military off to wage the wrong kind of war. Had Washington recognized Vietnam as a war of aggression from the North and not as an insurgency supported by the North, had U.S. power been used fully against the North, and had Johnson enlisted popular support and a national commitment, the war could have been won quickly and decisively. Instead, a protracted war played into the hands of the enemy and contributed to disillusionment at home, a factor aggravated by the antiwar protests and biased reporting in the media. Even in the mistaken war of search-and-destroy, the United States had its opportunities to win, but the military was restrained by civilian leaders: It could not bomb vital targets in the North; it could not pursue the enemy into Cambodian and Laotian "sanctuaries"; it could not exploit its "victory" in the Tet Offensive. When Nixon removed many restrictions, some revisionists argue, U.S. air power demonstrated its ability to force concessions. Generally, Vietnamization succeeded, but the South Vietnamese were let down by a spineless Congress and were overwhelmed by the North's 1975 invasion.

Although the Clausewitzian revisionists focus their criticism on civilian leadership, they are mindful of many shortcomings in the military's command structure and in its conduct of the war. Some accounts are critical of Westmoreland's leadership, while others see him as forced by circumstances into a futile war of attrition.

Such revisionism has a familiar tone. Just as revisionist writings on American intervention in the two world wars found America victimized by conspirators or, at the least, by incompetent civilian leaders, so too do Clausewitzians see fools and knaves undermining the Vietnam War effort. Beyond criticism of Johnson's conduct of the war, revisionists maintain that the media and the antiwar protest movement misled and divided the country. Elevating Vietnam into the mythology of a lost cause, some revisionist writing thus explains defeat implicitly in "stab-in-the-back" terms.<sup>7</sup>

While the Clausewitzians criticize Johnson and other civilian leaders for misinterpreting the conflict and restraining the military, the hearts-and-minds revisionists argue that too much attention was devoted to conventional warfare to the detriment of effective pacification. While the Clausewitzians blame

<sup>6</sup> Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA, 1982); Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY, 1984); Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (Novato, CA, 1988); idem, *Secrets of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA, 1990); Shelby L. Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973* (New York, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Among other expressions are: William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, 1976); Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York, 1985); General William E. DePuy, "What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn't Do It," *Army* 36 (February 1986): 23-40; and Robert F. Turner, "Myths and Realities in the Vietnam Debate," *World Politics* 149 (Summer 1986): 35-47.

For the thinking of military officers who opposed the war on political, strategic, and moral grounds see Bob Buzzanco, "The American Military's Rationale against the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly* 101:4 (1986): 559-76.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey P. Kimball, "The Stab-in-the-Back Legend and the Vietnam War," *Armed Forces and Society* 14 (Spring 1988): 433-58.

civilian officials for failure, the hearts-and-minders fault the army leadership for both resisting and misapplying counterinsurgency doctrine. The "search-and-destroy" campaign was actually waged in far too conventional a manner, resulting in insufficient attention to pacification.

To many participants in the war, this issue still stirs deep emotions. For instance, in *About Face*, David Hackworth, renowned for his battlefield achievements in Vietnam, indicts the search-and-destroy strategy, the shortcomings of which were evident to the American command early in the war. General William Westmoreland had "enough troops and charts and graphs and formulas to do everything but win and solve the conflict," Hackworth writes. But he failed to understand guerrilla warfare—"an almost criminal shortcoming."<sup>8</sup>

Andrew Krepinevich and Larry Cable share Hackworth's assessment of the U.S. military leadership but offer more measured and fuller expressions of the hearts-and-minds argument. In *The Army and Vietnam*, Krepinevich criticizes the army's dismissal of counterinsurgency as a "fad" of the New Frontier and its insistence on waging it "American-style" through an air mobile "high-cost low-payoff strategy" that minimized the "other war" of pacification. Securing the countryside would have been difficult, but according to Krepinevich, who served as an army officer in Vietnam, it would have been less costly in human and financial terms and "would have placed the Army in a position to sustain its efforts in a conflict environment certain to produce a protracted war."<sup>9</sup>

In both *Conflict of Myths* and *Unholy Grail*, Cable faults the army's misapplication of counterinsurgency doctrine. In fact, he turns the Clausewitzian argument on its head and says that the United States actually (but incorrectly) fought a conventional war against the North. Insisting that the Vietcong insurgency exemplified partisan warfare in which a guerrilla movement depended on external support, the army incorrectly saw North Vietnam as the enemy and fought a conventional war with Clausewitzian emphasis on massive destruction. Only the Marines, with their experience in the Banana Wars of the early twentieth century, understood and dealt with the indigenous origins of insurgency. American military strategy consistently played into the hands of North Vietnam, giving it greater influence in the South: Rolling Thunder provided the impetus for increased infiltration of the South; and the mindless ground war disrupted Southern society and undermined the Vietcong. "In an attempt to solve a problem that did not exist," Cable writes, "[the United States] created a problem that could not be solved."<sup>10</sup>

Complementing the Clausewitzians and the hearts-and-minders are the legitimacists, who emphasize the moral and political necessity of U.S. involvement in terms of national security and the viability and progress of the

<sup>8</sup> Colonel David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face* (New York, 1989), 556, 613-14.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1986), 233.

<sup>10</sup> Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War* (New York, 1988), 225; idem, *Unholy Grail: The US and the Wars in Vietnam, 1965-1968* (London, 1991).

South Vietnamese government. Also emphasizing the "aggression" of North Vietnam, the legitimacists help reinforce the Clausewitzian contention of a conventional war. Legitimacists see the United States as headed in the right direction in the late 1950s and argue that it should have stood by Ngo Dinh Diem, who, as subsequent events would demonstrate, was the South's most effective leader. His overthrow led only to the political instability that eventually necessitated U.S. military intervention. In an early expression of this viewpoint, Norman Podhoretz's strident *Why We Were in Vietnam* stresses the moral and political imperatives of U.S. policy, the strength of anticommunism in the South, and the shallowness of the war's critics.<sup>11</sup>

The legitimacist argument is being presented most fully in R. B. Smith's multivolume *An International History of the Vietnam War*. In his first two volumes—*Revolution versus Containment* and *The Kennedy Strategy*—Smith advances a view of the emerging conflict that emphasizes the Chinese and Soviet interest in Vietnam. As the Soviet Union pursued coexistence with the West in the late 1950s, Hanoi feared isolation and dependence on China. But by taking advantage of Southern insurgent demands for support, Ho Chi Minh forced the Chinese and the Soviets into backing the nationalist cause. By the time that John F. Kennedy became president, Vietnam had become a major problem "for reasons more to do with the global strategies of the Soviet Union and China, and with American vulnerability, than with the exercise of options on the part of the United States." The symbolic value was real: "In both the American and the Marxist-Leninist context, South Vietnam—an agrarian country of fewer than fifteen million people—thus acquired an international significance out of all proportion to its size." The demise of Ngo Dinh Diem played into the hands of the North Vietnamese who exploited and infiltrated a Buddhist protest movement that attracted widespread notoriety in the reports of glib Western journalists. Contrary to the conventional view that the political deterioration of South Vietnam began in the summer of 1963, Smith believes that "there can be little doubt that the principal factor in the deterioration (which certainly occurred by mid-December) was the coup itself and its political consequences." Buoyed by the weaknesses of the South and the assurances of external support, Hanoi forced the military showdown with the Americans in February 1965. To the Americans and the Chinese, the ultimate prize was Indonesia. Hence, U.S. intervention "bought time" for "democracy" in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Ellen Hammer and Patrick Hatcher concur with Smith that the "crisis" leading to Diem's overthrow was more of American than Vietnamese origin and that the United States erred in replacing him. This judgment essentially restates the Defense Department's 1963 position as it opposed State Department and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) maneuvering against Diem. To his contemporary and retrospective supporters, Diem's strong-willed nationalism was the best hope for South Vietnam. In *A Death in November*, Hammer suggests that Diem, despite his considerable faults, had a

<sup>11</sup>Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were in Vietnam* (New York, 1982).

<sup>12</sup>R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, Vol. 1, *Revolution versus Containment, 1955-1961* (New York, 1983), 261; Vol. 2, *The Kennedy Strategy* (New York, 1985), 1, 190.

better sense of South Vietnam's interests than other indigenous leaders and certainly than the Americans. Resentful of American manipulation, Diem refused to play the puppet and was prepared to lessen his dependence on Washington by pursuing a neutral course. As a result, the CIA engaged in intrigue with South Vietnamese dissidents that led to Diem's assassination. In their frustrations with a situation that defied American expectations, correspondents Neil Sheehan, Malcolm Brown, David Halberstam, and others found a scapegoat in Diem and blithely assumed that his overthrow would bring stability and progress.

In *The Suicide of an Elite: American Internationalists and Vietnam*, Hatcher cites evidence of rural and urban economic growth during the Diem era. He contends that the failure to stand by Diem deprived the South of the only leader capable of upholding Vietnamese pride in the face of the technical superiority of the growing American presence, which "denied authenticity to the Vietnamese character of Saigon's intervention."<sup>13</sup>

The conviction that Diem was America's best hope was shared by the legendary hard-nosed CIA operative Edward Lansdale and is implicitly embraced by Cecil B. Currey in his admiring biography, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American*. Convinced that lessons from his renowned work in the Philippines could be applied in Vietnam, Lansdale pressed Americans and Diem to recognize the centrality of pacification and preparation for counter-insurgency. Despite their close friendship, Lansdale could not persuade Diem to pursue rural reform or to broaden his political base. Yet he strongly criticized the coup, believing that only Diem could bring orderly constitutional development to South Vietnam.<sup>14</sup>

The subsequent Americanization of the war is treated in R. B. Smith's third volume, *The Making of a Limited War, 1965-66*, where he argues that the international challenge posed by the situation in Vietnam justified Johnson's decision for war. Given the Soviet and Chinese support of Hanoi, the instability of Southeast Asia, and "a very real Chinese campaign to eliminate United States power and influence not just from South Vietnam but from the East and Southeast Asian region," Vietnam was by 1965 "part of a global power struggle which President Johnson could not easily have ignored." By the end of 1966, however, Johnson was forced by circumstances to accept Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's prescription for "stabilization," which meant to gird for a longer war. "Limiting the scope of the war was now more vital to the interests of the United States," Smith writes, "than going all out to win it."<sup>15</sup>

In *The War Everyone Lost—and Won*, Timothy J. Lomperis carries the legitimacy argument to the end of the war, contending that the United States "lost while winning" and betrayed South Vietnam in the process. Lomperis characterizes the struggle between the North and the South as one to attain

<sup>13</sup>Ellen Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York, 1987); Patrick Lloyd Hatcher, *The Suicide of an Elite: American Internationalists and Vietnam* (Stanford, 1980).

<sup>14</sup>Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Boston, 1988).

<sup>15</sup>R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, Vol. 3, *The Making of a Limited War, 1965-66* (New York, 1991), 3, 18, 47.

legitimacy. The Communists failed to demonstrate the legitimacy of people's war and, after defeat in the Tet Offensive, they resorted to conventional warfare. By 1973, the Saigon government "found the tide . . . decidedly in its favor," but it had gained only a "passive legitimacy" and never had the opportunity to build an "active legitimacy." When the critical test came in the North Vietnamese attack of 1975, the United States abandoned South Vietnam. In the end, Hanoi may have unified the country, but the lack of revolutionary legitimacy has plagued its governance.<sup>16</sup>

Paralleling the wave of revisionism has been refinement of the orthodox criticism of U.S. involvement, with most of this neo-orthodox scholarship focusing on the 1954–1968 period.<sup>17</sup> As revisionism was taking hold, George Herring's *America's Longest War* and Paul Kattenburg's *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy*, published in 1979 and 1980, respectively, cast the war in the context of a Cold War-driven quarter century's effort to assure the establishment of a non-Communist state in Vietnam. Suggesting a more complex policymaking than that described by Gelb and Betts, Herring and Kattenburg contend that a misreading of U.S. interests and Vietnamese realities led to a doomed effort to build an independent South Vietnam and ultimately to an unwinnable military intervention.<sup>18</sup> This "flawed containment" interpretation is central to much subsequent neo-orthodox scholarship. These works have moved beyond analysis of decision making in Washington to examine the impact of the war protests and media on the home front and the conduct of the war itself. Although most of the recent writing has an American emphasis, some scholars have tried to understand the various Vietnamese "sides" of the story, including the struggle for control of the South Vietnamese countryside and the strategies of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. In the process, these works help to join the debate with revisionism, for their

<sup>16</sup>Timothy J. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost—And Won: America's Intervention in Viet Nam's Twin Struggles* (Baton Rouge, 1984), 173.

<sup>17</sup>On the earlier involvement dating from World War II, much work has been done that is being augmented by recent notable efforts that promise to recast developments in Vietnam during World War II and the early Cold War within an international history context. These include at least two dissertations in progress—Mark Bradley, Harvard University, "Making Cold War: Vietnam-France Relations, 1941–1955," and Patricia Lane, University of Hawaii, "U.S.-Tonnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and de Gaulle in a World at War* (Oslo, 1991), which stresses the importance of the Japanese coup of March 1945 in the Vietnam's bid for power. Tonnesson argues that the United States fostered the coup, Roosevelt, clinging to his objective of eliminating the French administration as essential to realization of his trusteeship plan, deceived the Japanese into anticipating a U.S. attack and thus encouraged the coup.

The geopolitical interests behind the U.S. reconsideration of its Southeast Asian policy in 1949–50 that led to the initial diplomatic and material support of the French has been explored in a number of works, including William S. Borden, *The Pacific Alliance: United States Foreign Economic Policy and Japanese Trade Recovery, 1947–1955* (Madison, 1984); Gary R. Hess, *The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940–1950* (New York, 1987); Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment in Southeast Asia* (Urbana, 1987); and Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York, 1985). For a useful survey of the literature see Robert J. McMahon, "The Cold War in Asia: Toward a New Synthesis?" *Diplomatic History* 12 (Summer 1988): 307–27.

<sup>18</sup>George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York, 1979); Paul M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945–1975* (New Brunswick, 1980).

findings provide insight into the viability of certain revisionist arguments and "if only" scenarios.

A few scholars endeavor to relate the war to cultural imperatives. To Loren Baritz and James William Gibson, American involvement reflected a technological culture run amuck. Both Baritz, a social historian, and Gibson, a sociologist, stress an expansionist and militarist technology. Their works are polemically not dispassionate, and perhaps ought to be dismissed as more polemic than scholarship. Yet each of their books offers certain insights. In *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into the Vietnam War and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*, Baritz contends that a "national myth showed us that we were good, [that] our technology made us strong, and [that] our bureaucracy gave us standard operating procedures. It was not a winning combination." Ethnocentric American leaders "invented" South Vietnam and relied on a technologically based capacity to kill to achieve a vision of Pax Americana.<sup>19</sup>

In a similar argument, Gibson, in *The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't Lose and How We Did*, characterizes American society as enthralled by the "logic of Technowar," which rendered unthinkable any outcome other than that the "largest, fastest, most technologically advanced system [would] win." Although filled with abstraction and jargon, *The Perfect War* nonetheless includes useful information on how war managers' obliviousness to Vietnamese political realities and faith in quantitative data led to consistent miscalculations and an inept military strategy.<sup>20</sup>

With the opening of British and American archives as well as the personal papers of key figures, scholars have reexamined the 1954 crisis that began with the siege of Dien Bien Phu and continued through the Geneva and Manila conferences partitioning Vietnam and establishing the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), respectively. In a careful study of Eisenhower's leadership, *Decision against War*, Melanie Billings-Yun follows the Eisenhower revisionist interpretation of a decisive leader shrewdly and indirectly achieving his goal of keeping the United States out of war. As Billings-Yun demonstrates, the conventional view of a president restrained by British and congressional opposition to intervention was an astute misrepresentation designed by Eisenhower, who had decided early in the crisis that the use of U.S. force was not worth the resultant damage to American stature and, above all, the risk of a war. Restating a more conventional view is James Arnold's *The First Domino*. Arnold contends that only political considerations held back a hawkish Eisenhower in 1954, but that his critical decisions in the "watershed year" 1955 forged inexorable links to the subsequent American-ization of the struggle.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into the Vietnam War and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York, 1985), 27, 40.

<sup>20</sup>James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't Lose and How We Did* (Boston, 1986), 16–17, 23.

<sup>21</sup>Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York, 1988); James R. Arnold, *The First Domino: Eisenhower, the Military, and America's Intervention in Vietnam* (New York, 1991).

In *Approaching Vietnam*, Lloyd Gardner casts U.S. policy within the context of the "liberal empire's" post-World War II objective of "liberation," which by 1954 centered on freeing Indochina from French mistakes. Gardner stresses the role of the peripatetic John Foster Dulles in forging a British-French-American commitment to the partition of Vietnam at Geneva and the subsequent reaffirmation of that outcome through SEATO. The resultant support of a "liberated" Vietnam ultimately revealed the "contradictions in nation building . . . [derived from] the conviction, shared before [Dulles] by people all the way back to Roosevelt with his plan for a trusteeship, that America had a special talent for liberating colonized peoples."<sup>22</sup>

Like Gardner, Anthony Short criticizes U.S. policy in 1954 as being shortsighted and leading to warfare a decade later. In Short's judgment, however, the U.S. failure was not so much in misguided nation-building but in missing what was in its grasp: international commitment to permanent partition. The principal contribution of Short's *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, a work notable for its even-handed criticism of all of the governments involved in leading Vietnam to war in 1965, is a detailed reexamination of the 1954 crisis. Short questions whether America's determined effort to be "in but not of" the Geneva settlement served its interests. The failure of the United States to approve the Geneva Accords, Short argues, undermined its very interest in partition. "By refusing to join in any guarantees with the communist states," Short contends, "one has to ask whether Dulles rejected a finite end to the first Vietnam War and, in so doing, doomed the United States to participate in the second."<sup>23</sup>

Scholars are also reexamining America's relationship with the government headed by Ngo Dinh Diem. Chief among them is David L. Anderson, whose *Trapped by Success* describes U.S. support for Diem during the Eisenhower administration as "buying time but also buying trouble." American policy was the "creator and [the] captive of an illusion in Vietnam." Dismissing any idea of a "stalemate" thesis, Anderson shows how officials believed that time was in their favor, that progress was occurring, and that North Vietnam was not a serious threat. The mission of J. Lawton Collins in 1955 constituted the "point of no return," for Collins alone among high officials recognized Diem's shortcomings. Nevertheless, spurred by Dulles's enthusiasm for Diem, American policy embraced a partnership with his

<sup>22</sup>Lloyd C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954* (New York, 1988), 354.

<sup>23</sup>Anthony Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (London, 1989), 328-29. In addition to the monographs regarding the United States and the 1954 crisis, a number of articles—notably the work of Richard H. Immerman—add significantly to the story: George C. Herring and Richard H. Immerman, "Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: 'The Day We Didn't Go to War' Revisited," *Journal of American History* 71 (September 1984): 343-63; Richard H. Immerman, "Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable: Eisenhower and Dienbienphu," in *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the Fifties*, ed. Richard A. Melanson and David Mayers (Urbana, 1987), 120-54; and idem, "The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954: A New Look," *Diplomatic History* 14 (Winter 1990): 43-66. Immerman finds Eisenhower's diplomacy to be reasonably effective in responding to the Dien Bien Phu crisis but questions the soundness of the U.S. approach to the Geneva settlement.

government. Ignorance and indifference resulted in a "commitment to the survival of [America's] own counterfeited creation."<sup>24</sup>

The analyses of Ronald Spector on the early military assistance program and of D. Michael Shafer on pacification reinforce Anderson's conclusions. In *Advice and Support*, Spector describes the first flawed effort at Vietnamization. Trained by Americans to resist Korea-type aggression from the North, ARVN was ill-prepared for counterinsurgency. More important, it suffered from the moral, structural, and political problems that were endemic to the Diem regime.

In his *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy*, Shafer challenges the retrospective "might have beens" about "winning" the countryside through pacification by pointing out the flaws in American thinking and programs. He faults American doctrine for linking insurgency to external sources, based in part on inappropriate "lessons" of Greece and Turkey. In both cases, U.S. efforts were irrelevant, as leaders of threatened regimes used aid to reinforce their strength but without confronting the basis of the insurgency. Hence, contrary to the thinking of people like Edward Lansdale, the United States had no useful experience to bring to the Vietnam conflict. Focusing on counterinsurgency during the Diem regime, Shafer finds an uncoordinated U.S. program compounded by Diem's resistance to U.S. suggestions and Washington's reluctance to employ its leverage.<sup>25</sup>

The opening of documentation on Johnson's decisions to Americanize the war in 1965 has led to several notable studies, with the president's role a point of historiographical debate. Whether writing critically or sympathetically of Johnson's situation, scholars generally stress the influence of "guns-and-butter" thinking on his 1965 decisions and see a flaw in his penchant for compromise.

Larry Berman's *Planning a Tragedy* characterizes Johnson as driven by a domestic political agenda that would "merit nothing less than Mount Rushmore" and therefore as determined to resolve the Vietnam problem quickly and quietly. Fearful that the loss of Vietnam would trigger the kind of partisan debate that followed the Chinese civil war, Johnson used the decision-making process from February through July 1965 in ways that ignored any

<sup>24</sup>David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York, 1991), 227, 304, 409.

<sup>25</sup>Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (New York, 1985); D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton, 1988).

There are two books on Kennedy's Vietnam policy: William J. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam: American Foreign Policy, 1960-1963* (New York, 1985); and John M. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue, and the Struggle for Power* (New York, 1992). Newman's book, which accompanied the release of Oliver Stone's motion picture *JFK*, pieces together documents that purportedly demonstrate a conspiracy against a Kennedy commitment to withdraw from Vietnam; immediately after Kennedy's assassination, Johnson, duped into thinking he was carrying on Kennedy's policy, actually reversed it and took the measures that led to U.S. military involvement. The Rust work summarizes Kennedy's involvement and, like Newman's (although without any hint of conspiracies), sees Kennedy disengaging from Vietnam. For more critical appraisals of Kennedy's policy see Lawrence Basset and Stephen Pelz, "The Failed Search for Victory: Vietnam and the Politics of War," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York, 1989), 223-52; and Gary R. Hess, "Commitment in the Age of Counter-Insurgency: Kennedy and Vietnam," in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War*, ed. David L. Anderson (Lawrence, 1993).

examination of the assumptions about the commitment to South Vietnam and that placed the burden of proof on dovish, not hawkish, advisers. With scant regard for the magnitude of his decisions, Johnson went to war out of fear that "losing Vietnam in the summer of 1965 would wreck his plans for a truly Great Society."<sup>26</sup>

The inadequacy of decision making in the Johnson White House is also stressed in *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam 1954 and 1965* by John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein (with the assistance of Berman and Richard H. Immerman). Comparing Johnson's decision-making process with that of Eisenhower, Burke and Greenstein suggest that Johnson could have learned something from Eisenhower's more formal, open advocacy advisory system. In the incoherent policy review leading to the 28 July 1965 troop commitment, it seemed that "a great swirl of policy recommendations and analyses . . . simply floated past the President."<sup>27</sup>

In Brian Van De Mark's *Into the Quagmire*, Johnson and his advisers are seen as more reluctant warriors. "Like figures in a Greek tragedy," Van De Mark writes, "pride compelled these supremely confident men further into disaster." In this largely sympathetic appraisal of a president confronting intractable problems, Johnson emerges as soliciting advice from dovish as well as hawkish advisers. While Van De Mark portrays a more open minded Johnson than Berman and Burke and Greenstein, his work also underlines the fact that debate was limited by the failure to examine basic assumptions of U.S. interest in Southeast Asia and the fears of right-wing backlash if Johnson appeared irresolute.<sup>28</sup>

According to Yuen Foong Khong, these conventional accounts of the decision for war minimize the significance of historical analogies—in this case, the lessons of the Korean War—on the reasoning of policymakers. In *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*, Khong offers a provocative interpretation of the mindset that both exaggerated Vietnam's importance and minimized the obstacles to American objectives. Employing cognitive psychology research and techniques, he examines policymakers' reasoning through historical analogies. Earlier scholars have acknowledged the references to "lessons of the past" in policy debates and in public justifications for intervention, but often this has been to show how poorly history is used and without substantive analysis of the extent to which lessons actually influenced decisions or provided rationales for choices made on other grounds. Khong contends that schemas and analogies are fundamental to apprehending reality, interpreting problems, and determining policy options. After analyzing how policymakers used the Munich, Korean, and Dien Bien Phu analogies, Khong concludes that the lessons of the Korean War (a successful limited war in which the only major

<sup>26</sup>Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York, 1982), 147.

<sup>27</sup>John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam 1954 and 1965* (New York, 1991), 261.

<sup>28</sup>Brian Van De Mark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York, 1991), 219.

mistake was the provocation of China) defined the terms of intervention in Vietnam.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to the centrality of Washington in most accounts of the 1965 decisions, the culmination of George Kahin's notable binational study, *Intervention*, is both the decision for war and its effects on the Vietnamese. American indifference toward Vietnamese history and politics is central to Kahin's careful analysis of U.S.-Vietnamese interaction beginning in 1946. In the South, American actions after 1954 blunted the emergence of a viable "third force" centering around the Buddhist leadership. By 1964-65, Johnson weighed his options in a deteriorating situation. Recognizing that the Saigon government would likely seek negotiations with the National Liberation Front (NLF), that the Chinese had a strong interest in Vietnam, and that America's allies did not support escalation, Johnson searched for answers to an intractable problem. A negotiated settlement risked South Vietnam's survival and hence political support for his Great Society. When Johnson intervened, it was done cautiously, rejecting calls for an invasion or all-out bombing of the North. Intervention, however, had a devastating effect on South Vietnam as it buttressed U.S. support of the government headed by Generals Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu and thus destroyed whatever prospects existed for the Buddhist third force between the NLF and the Saigon military. The "rigid polarization" left the South Vietnamese without the option of compromise, "permitting only two active choices—supporting the NLF or a Saigon regime shaped by and dependent upon the United States." Hence, U.S. intervention meant an ever-widening divergence of American objectives from indigenous political forces.<sup>30</sup>

Johnson's determined consensus building, which hindered effective decision making in 1965, continued, in the judgment of most scholars, to limit his effectiveness as a wartime president. In *When Governments Collide*, Wallace Thies finds that Johnson's determination to control the conduct of the war actually led to a loss of control. Thies's focus is the futile search for a means of negotiation. The doctrine that orchestrating diplomacy with fine-tuned military coercion could bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table failed in practice. Johnson was largely to blame: His consistent search for consensus within his administration, rather than control of the U.S. war, "provides an almost perfect lesson in how *not* to engage in coercion." As Johnson compromised between the advice of the hawks and the doves, which always meant increased warfare, he left leaders in Hanoi seeing only hypocrisy and deceit. Whether the two sides could have reached an agreement on the issue of South Vietnam's political status is problematic, but mismanagement of U.S. diplomacy and warfare meant that "errors and misunderstandings *did* exist, and their effect was to make an already difficult problem virtually insoluble."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, 1992).

<sup>30</sup>George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986), 432.

<sup>31</sup>Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968* (Berkeley, 1980), 373-74 (emphasis in original).

Johnson's leadership at home, according to Kathleen J. Turner and Larry Berman, suffered from similar flaws. Turner, in *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*, analyzes the public dimension of the futile effort to appease both hawks and doves by demonstrating that the United States was doing "enough" but not "too much." Turner examines in detail the Johns Hopkins University address of April 1965—in which Johnson blended a strident defense of the American position with a proposal for American-financed cooperative development of the Mekong Delta—as an early illustration of Johnson's frustrations in rationalizing Southeast Asian policy.<sup>32</sup>

In *Lyndon Johnson's War*, Berman extends such analysis into a portrayal of Johnson as becoming a tragic figure whose ultimate demise resulted from flaws of leadership. The "tragedy in the making" in Berman's earlier book thus gained national and personal dimensions. Berman writes of a president who took the country to war without calling for national commitment and who publicly embraced a strategy that he privately questioned. Unable to resolve the dilemma of maintaining the independence of South Vietnam without destroying North Vietnam, Johnson by 1967 faced the imperfect alternatives of sending another three hundred thousand troops or stabilizing the commitment at five hundred thousand. With a presidential campaign on the horizon, Johnson avoided difficult choices and indulged in wishful thinking that the war was actually being won. He thus orchestrated the "big sell" of "progress" in Vietnam and unwittingly contributed to the popular disillusionment that came with the Tet Offensive.<sup>33</sup>

Besides paying considerable attention to Johnson's leadership, historians have also been reassessing the roles of other key figures in Vietnam policymaking. As the war went sour, the reputations of the "best and the brightest" were tarnished and "doves" moved into the ascendancy. Scholarship thus far completed suggests that the war left mostly "losers."

Dean Rusk may be doing as well as any. In retrospect, Rusk looks much as he did in the 1960s: the uncomplicated Cold Warrior unwaveringly loyal to Kennedy and Johnson and committed to U.S. objectives. In Warren I. Cohen's close analysis of Rusk's years as secretary of state and in Thomas J. Schoenham's biography of Rusk—both sympathetic accounts—and in Rusk's own quasi-memoir, told largely in response to his son's questions, Rusk emerges as skeptical of U.S. military strategy and Saigon's viability and perplexed by the dedication of the enemy and the war weariness of the American public. Only domestic political necessity forced his acceptance of negotiations and deescalation.<sup>34</sup>

Although now somewhat dated, Robert L. Gallucci, *Neither Peace Nor Honor: The Politics of American Military Policy in Viet-Nam* (Baltimore, 1975), provides a still useful comparative analysis of Kennedy and Johnson policymaking within a bureaucratic politics framework. As the war escalated from 1965 to 1967, a pattern of compromise continued, but without benefit of sufficient nonmilitary input—a conclusion that challenges revisionist contentions about a lack of military influence.

<sup>32</sup>Kathleen Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago, 1985).

<sup>33</sup>Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate* (New York, 1989).

<sup>34</sup>Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, NJ, 1980); Thomas J. Schoenham, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (New York, 1988); Dean Rusk, as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York, 1990).

Rusk's self-effacing style contrasts sharply with that of the visible and energetic Robert McNamara, the subject of Deborah Shapley's insightful and unflattering biography, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* is strongest in its effort to come to terms with McNamara's mind and character. Shapley describes an arrogant, number-crunching, emotionally and intellectually flawed Cold Warrior who believed that "applied intelligence, organization, and resources could mold reality to suit his will." McNamara's quantitative measures in Vietnam led to arbitrary decisions and premature evaluations of success. Moreover, as the good manager, McNamara determined what superiors wanted and acted accordingly. Yet he was unable to accept a flawed outcome. The emotional strain of his growing realization that the war was unwinnable brought him nearly to the breaking point, and going to the World Bank in 1967 provided an opportunity to atone for the suffering that he helped to inflict on Vietnam. McNamara agreed to be interviewed by Shapley, who finds his recollections on Vietnam to be self-serving and disingenuous. Yet Shapley gives McNamara a hearing, allowing him to emphasize that as early as 1965 he doubted whether the military could achieve U.S. objectives and that he thus sought to keep open the negotiating channels even as intervention went forward. Had his calls for extended bombing pauses been accepted, he argues, the war could have ended earlier.<sup>35</sup>

Among the Kennedy advisers on Vietnam none carried greater initial prestige than Maxwell Taylor. Yet as Douglas Kinnard illustrates in *The Certain Trumpet*, Taylor—as Kennedy adviser, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ambassador to South Vietnam, and consultant to Johnson—underestimated the problems facing the United States and exhibited a lack of character. The Taylor-Rostow report, Kinnard correctly notes, is often remembered for the eight thousand troop recommendation that Kennedy rejected, but more important was the open-ended increase of advisers and resources it portended. In 1963, Taylor declined to "stand up and be counted when in the minority," putting aside his reservations about U.S. complicity in the plotting against Diem and about promises that American personnel could be withdrawn within two years. As ambassador in 1965, Taylor supported the bombing of North Vietnam and just as strongly opposed the introduction of ground forces. After losing on that issue, however, he characteristically stated that ground forces should have been committed earlier. In sum, Taylor's shortcoming in Vietnam policy "was not in what he did, but what he failed to do."<sup>36</sup>

Critics of the war were not necessarily more knowledgeable about Vietnam nor more honorable under pressure. The renowned dissent of resident dove Undersecretary of State George Ball is analyzed fully by David L. DiLeo in *George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment*. Ball emerges as a complex, ambitious man whose opposition to escalation and advocacy of negotiation reflected a Europe-centered worldview. Disdain, with a trace of racism, characterized his thinking on the Third World. Ball's refusal to make

<sup>35</sup>Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (Boston, 1993), 559.

<sup>36</sup>Douglas Kinnard, *The Certain Trumpet: Maxwell Taylor and the American Experience in Vietnam* (Washington, 1991), 216, 219.

his December 1966 resignation a matter of principle reflected more than loyalty to those he served. It also stemmed from Ball's reluctance to sabotage whatever prospects there were of Johnson turning to him to replace Rusk as secretary of state. According to DiLeo, Ball was too concerned with preserving his status to vigorously criticize American conduct of the war.<sup>37</sup>

Then there was John Paul Vann, who was never modest about "understanding" the Vietnamese and whom Neil Sheehan calls "the one compelling figure [in the] war without heroes." Sheehan was part of the small Saigon press corps in the early 1960s that Vann transformed "into a band of reporters propounding the John Vann view of the war." In *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, he argues that Vann's "accumulated expertise and aptitude for this war made him the one irreplaceable American." Yet the subsequent analysis of Vann's military and advisory career in Vietnam sustains Vann as more "compelling" than "irreplaceable." Losing his life in a helicopter accident in 1972, Vann "died believing he had won this war." The "lie" in all of this was Vann's nonheroic side. He was an amoral, selfish, deceitful, compulsive man whose duality of character exemplified the American role in Vietnam. Vann emerges as a tragic figure in a doomed enterprise: "He was much that was wrong about the war . . . but he could never bring himself to conclude that the war itself was wrong and unwinnable." In the end, Americans were betrayed by Vann and the U.S. government, for both became a "bright shining lie." Whether the career of Vann or any figure can be a metaphor for the American experience, Sheehan's work yields insight into the remarkable arrogance of the American intervention.<sup>38</sup>

The paucity of documents on the administration of Richard M. Nixon has limited research on its Vietnam policy. The fullest account is Arnold R. Isaacs's *Without Honor*. Isaacs acknowledges the problems and accomplishments of the approach taken by Nixon and Henry Kissinger. They came to power recognizing that the war could not be won and seeking an exit that would be tolerable to the American public and that would preserve American credibility. The 1973 agreement they brokered was more favorable to American and South Vietnamese interests than what could have been negotiated at the beginning of Nixon's term. Yet the flaw in the Nixon-Kissinger approach was that the two realists failed to focus on the objective of an honorable exit. They could not understand that the North's suspicion of negotiations derived from frustrating experiences in 1946 and 1954. In "the single act by which the Nixon administration closed the trap on itself," they senselessly expanded the fighting into Cambodia with devastating consequences for both that country and the United States. Before and especially after the 1973 agreement, they allowed the South Vietnamese government to expect long-term American aid and thus "nourished [Thieu's] fantasies of support in pursuit of an unattainable victory." And they shamelessly blamed

<sup>37</sup>David L. DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

<sup>38</sup>Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York, 1988).

Congress and antiwar protesters for undermining their efforts and South Vietnam's capacity to survive.<sup>39</sup>

Finger pointing accompanied the end of the war, as Kissinger and President Gerald Ford blamed Congress for the U.S. defeat. P. Edward Haley's *Congress and the Fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia* sees this criticism as disingenuous and contradictory. The White House kept secret its promises to save the Thieu government because it knew Congress would disapprove, and then in 1975 acted as if Congress should approve. Despite the realization that the commitments were meaningless and that the war was lost, congressional inaction brought Kissinger's "frustrations out, and he dressed them in cataclysm and the decline of the West."<sup>40</sup>

As Gelb and Betts write, the home front was "the last domino," and recent scholarship suggests a more complex domestic scene than that depicted by revisionists, who emphasize biased media coverage of the war and unpatriotic antiwar protesters as undermining public support and contributing to defeat. Two complementary studies—*An American Ordeal*, by Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, and *The Debate over Vietnam*, by David Levy—yield insight into the controversies generated by the war. DeBenedetti and Chatfield examine the many and shifting expressions of the antiwar "movement of movements" and capture the spontaneity and disjointed nature of protest. They contend that the major role of the antiwar movement was in "keeping open the prospect of defeat as a national option. Never a popular position, the disengagement—and even policy failure—was discussed in public from the start." The public always mistrusted the protesters, even as it gravitated toward the antiwar contention that Vietnam was not related to U.S. security.<sup>41</sup>

Levy's work looks at the arguments dividing hawks and doves and at the way the war affected various subcommunities, including minorities, intellectuals, religious groups, organized labor, political parties, and higher education. Unlike DeBenedetti and Chatfield, Levy largely eschews judgments on the meaning of the debate that he chronicles, but he does observe, as have scholars of public opinion, that war weariness augmented by the surprise of the Tet Offensive, rather than the force of argumentation, led to popular disaffection.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Arnold R. Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore, 1983), 493, 505.

<sup>40</sup>Two early appraisals of the Paris agreement—Garth Porter, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam, and the Paris Agreement* (Bloomington, 1975); and Allan E. Goodman, *The Lost Peace: America's Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War* (Stanford, 1978)—stress the futility of negotiating where fundamental issues defied compromise. Porter is the more critical of the American negotiating position, seeing the commitment to the preservation of an independent South Vietnam as delaying a settlement, precluding its implementation, and preventing adaptation to political-military changes in 1973–1975. Goodman is more apologetic for the American position, faulting Johnson's strategy of escalation mixed with conciliatory gestures for sending the wrong message to Hanoi. Yet Goodman is also skeptical of the viability of the Saigon government and concurs with Porter that the Paris agreement was fundamentally flawed.

<sup>41</sup>P. Edward Haley, *Congress and the Fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia* (Rutherford, NJ, 1982), 134.

<sup>42</sup>Charles DeBenedetti, assisted by Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, 1990), 407.

<sup>43</sup>David W. Levy, *The Debate over Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1991).

In *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, Melvin Small undertakes the difficult task of tracing the antiwar movement's influence on two presidents, each of whom professed indifference to protest. Small's cautious conclusions are plausible, as he finds a largely indirect but significant impact. Together with the force of events, protest informed the thinking of the intellectual and opinion-making communities, whose support is vital to any president, and thus helped to force Johnson and Nixon into deescalatory steps. Moreover, both presidents shaped policy partly on the calculation that Hanoi considered popular opposition in America as a factor in its favor.<sup>43</sup>

The role of J. William Fulbright (D-AR) who, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee emerged as the leading congressional critic of the war, has been most fully analyzed by William C. Bertram. Presenting Fulbright's opposition within the framework of his realist approach to foreign policy, Bertram details his tireless role, both through his writings and through the Foreign Relations Committee, to educate Americans about the folly of the war and, more generally, about mindless militant anticommunism. It took longer than Fulbright and other doves had anticipated to reassert congressional prerogatives, but in 1973 the curtailment of the Cambodian campaign and the passage of the War Powers Resolution constituted important victories.<sup>44</sup>

The conclusions reached by Daniel Hallin in *The "Uncensored War"* and by William Hammond in *The Military and the Media* refute revisionist claims regarding biased reporting. Hallin's analysis of selected newspaper and television coverage finds that the media as an establishment institution represented, rather than determined, public opinion. Coverage of the war in the *New York Times* and on network news supported the U.S. effort through 1967; afterward, stories became more skeptical, but by that time the war was a topic of legitimate controversy. Hammond's study, a volume in the army's history of the war that stresses the dilemmas facing the military's information officers, criticizes coverage for a lack of depth but also emphasizes the accuracy of the media, especially when contrasted with the Johnson administration's record of concealments and circumlocutions. Most television coverage was banal and stylized, and Hammond questions its impact on public opinion.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick, 1988).

<sup>44</sup>Preceding Bertram's work were studies by Eugene Brown, who also integrates Fulbright's ideas and actions and reaches similar conclusions, and by Lee Riley Powell, who highlights the contents of the Fulbright committee's hearings on Asian policy. William C. Bertram, *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist* (Kent, OH, 1988); Eugene Brown, *J. William Fulbright: Advice and Dissent* (Iowa City, 1985); Lee Riley Powell, *J. William Fulbright and America's Lost Crusade: Fulbright's Opposition to the Vietnam War* (Little Rock, 1984).

Congress and the war has received little attention. The role of Republicans, especially their congressional leaders, in the debate over Vietnam policy has been studied by Terry Dietz. The war strained the party's commitment to bipartisanship and caused divisions within its ranks, thus preventing it from playing an effective opposition role. As House minority leader, Gerald Ford was an exception; his probing of Johnson's policy contrasted sharply to the deference shown Johnson by his friend, Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen. Terry Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961-1968* (Westport, 1986).

<sup>45</sup>Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam, 1962-1968* (Washington, William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, 1988).

Besides the attention to events in the United States, scholars have also focused on Vietnam—the nature of warfare, the struggle for the South Vietnamese countryside, and the conflict from the “other side.” Perhaps the best account of a single battle is Harold Moore and Joseph Galloway's *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*, which recounts the Ia Drang Valley campaign of November 1965 in which American and North Vietnamese regular units met for the first time and from which both sides drew “lessons” that guided subsequent warfare. Moore and Galloway base their compelling narrative on interviews with American and North Vietnamese veterans. They conclude their account of the brutal combat with a final chapter outlining the “lessons” each side took from the encounter. While the North Vietnamese learned that they could withstand mobile air power, the American command read the twelve-to-one casualty ratio and incorrectly deduced that “they could bleed the enemy to death over the long haul, with a war of attrition.” Alone among civilian officials, McNamara recognized that the war had changed as the stalemate at Ia Drang signaled a long and costly war.<sup>46</sup>

A number of notable studies have analyzed the ensuing air and ground war. In *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam*, Mark Clodfelter challenges the air force's central historical “lesson,” that “airpower can be strategically decisive if its application is intense, continuous, and focused on the enemy's vital systems.” Clodfelter's argument rests on two main points: (1) The ineffectiveness of Operation Rolling Thunder reflected inherent limitations on strategic bombing and the ineptitude of military, as much as civilian, leaders; (2) The Linebacker campaign is an inappropriate model of what air power could have achieved earlier, since it “worked” because Nixon had the limited objective of facilitating U.S. withdrawal and because the North Vietnamese had shifted to conventional warfare. On the politics of the bombing, Clodfelter's work complements James Clay Thompson's earlier study, *Rolling Thunder*, which employs organizational theory to explain the air force's resistance to evidence of the bombing campaign's failure.<sup>47</sup>

The air war in the South has been analyzed in John Schligh's *Years of the Offensive*, a volume in the air force history, and in Donald J. Mrozek's *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam*. Both find that the air force handled its tactical mission effectively and innovatively. But Mrozek, in the more critical analysis, concludes that although the air war enabled the United States to wage the ground conflict with fewer troops, at most it helped to avoid defeat rather than to bring victory. An especially controversial aspect of the air war was Operation Ranch Hand, which between 1962 and 1971 sprayed some eighteen million gallons of chemicals in the South. William Buckingham's *Operation Ranch Hand*, another volume in the air force history, explains the

<sup>46</sup>Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young: Ia Drang—The Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam* (New York, 1992), 339. Moore does not limit his criticism to Westmoreland. Instead, like almost all other commanders in Vietnam, he questions the limitations placed on military operations that allowed the retreating North Vietnamese to take sanctuary in Cambodia.

<sup>47</sup>Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York, 1989), 209; James Clay Thompson, *Rolling Thunder: Understanding Policy and Program Failure* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

expansion of the defoliation campaign as a function of escalation as well as the controversy surrounding the political, military, and ecological effects of the defoliants themselves. Richard L. Stevens is outspoken on the ecological issue and the futility of bombing. His study, *The Trail: A History of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Role of Nature in the War in Viet Nam*, asserts that bombing was doomed to fail, for the North Vietnamese had the advantage of nature and were able to change the trail to meet their needs. The Americans gained only a tragic "victory" over nature through the bombing's massive ecological damage.<sup>48</sup>

Ronald Spector's *After Tet* offers analysis not only of the neglected bloodshed of the year after the Tet Offensive but of the entire nature of the ground war. In many ways, this book is the most comprehensive integration of the conflict's political and military dimensions. Nineteen sixty-eight began and ended in stalemate, suggesting a repetition on the battlefield and in military thinking more akin to World War I than other modern wars. Each side was convinced that the other was about to capitulate and that victory would result from maintaining the offensive. Hence, the North Vietnamese undertook three subsequent offensives in the year after Tet and suffered enormous losses. Meanwhile, the United States continued inconclusive operations that reflected "the lack of any systematic attempt to pass on lessons or develop doctrine." Moreover, the South Vietnamese army had learned "how to rule, but not how to fight." In Spector's assessment, the "battles of 1968 were decisive . . . because they were so indecisive," for the stalemate benefited North Vietnam. Hence, the American position steadily eroded, as military morale declined in a morass of drug abuse and racial tensions and as the Communists rebuilt their forces and shadow governments in the countryside.<sup>49</sup>

Jeffrey Clarke's study of Vietnamization, a volume in the Department of the Army's history, reinforces Spector's findings. Clarke's study of the army's advisory role sees Vietnamization as clarifying U.S. objectives for ARVN and fostering American-ARVN operational cooperation. Evidence of military progress, however, was offset by ARVN's continuing lack of mobility and by its dependence on U.S. air and sea power. The ultimate failure was that no one believed ARVN could withstand an assault from the North on its own. Thus, Vietnamization, like earlier advisory phases, reflected an effort that may have been "hopeless from the start . . . [for] it was beyond the capacity of one power to reform and reshape the society of another." Vietnamization could equip ARVN, but it could not buy a will to fight.<sup>50</sup>

All sides in the conflict believed that what was happening in South Vietnam's villages was vital to the war's outcome. Several efforts have been made to examine political developments in rural areas, but the body of such

<sup>48</sup> John Schlight, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965-1968* (Washington, 1988); Donald J. Mrozek, *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam: Ideas and Actions* (Washington, 1989); William Buckingham, *Operation Ranch Hand: The Air Force and Herbicides in Southeast Asia, 1961-1971* (Washington, 1981); Richard L. Stevens, *The Trail: A History of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Role of Nature in the War in Viet Nam* (New York, 1993).

<sup>49</sup> Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York, 1993), 116, 313.  
<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey J. Clarke, *United States Army in Vietnam. Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973* (Washington, 1988), 521.

work, by definition, remains fragmented and limited by the scant availability of documentation. The few studies thus far completed suggest that the NLF had greater strength than the Saigon government and that American-South Vietnamese pacification programs, often flawed in their basic assumptions, had little effect. Vietnamization, it also seems, may have weakened the insurgency, but it did not necessarily bring attendant gains for the Saigon government.

In *The Endless War*, James Harrison traces the resiliency of Vietnamese communism and attributes its ultimate success to a program of determined organization in the South during the 1950s and 1960s. Examining village level work in three Mekong Delta provinces, Harrison argues that the entrenched Communists managed to survive Diem's anti-Communist campaign.<sup>51</sup> Among the provinces included in Harrison's study is Long An, and, for that part of his work, Harrison draws on Jeffrey Race's pioneering 1972 study, *War Comes to Long An*, which documents the insurgency's success in virtually eliminating the South Vietnamese government's presence by 1965 and how subsequent American and South Vietnamese military operations and reform efforts only further alienated the peasantry.<sup>52</sup>

Race completed his work in 1968, just as pacification was gaining renewed emphasis, and subsequent studies suggest that such efforts had negligible impact. Adjacent to Long An was the province of Hau Nghia, the locale Eric Bergerud studies in *The Dynamics of Defeat*. Detailing the various efforts of Americans and South Vietnamese in Hau Nghia from 1963 to 1973, Bergerud finds that the "difficulties [the Americans] faced were virtually beyond solution." Nothing could overcome the Saigon government's lack of legitimacy, which meant that while the NLF was weakened by the Phoenix campaign of 1969-1973, the Saigon government could not replace it. The rural population generally, and especially the "best and the brightest" among young people, supported the NLF, which derived its strength from its legacy of struggle and its promise of a better future. Finally, the Americans and the South Vietnamese were caught in the contradictions of the use of military force: it was the only means of attacking NLF strongholds, but it caused great suffering and destruction, which the NLF turned to its advantage.<sup>53</sup>

James Trullinger's *Village at War*, based on research in a different part of South Vietnam and at a later time, yields similar findings. Conducting interviews in a village near Hue from 1974 until overwhelmed by events in 1975, Trullinger stresses Communist resiliency. My Thuy Phuong was atypical in that the U.S. Army in 1968 had established an airborne base there that brought ten thousand Americans into a village normally populated by seventy-six hundred Vietnamese. Reconstructing the history of the struggle in this village, Trullinger finds that most of the village's inhabitants were disdainful of ARVN, sympathized with the activities of the insurgents, identified with

<sup>51</sup> James P. Harrison, *The Endless War: Fifty Years of Struggle for Independence in Vietnam* (New York, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley, 1972).

<sup>53</sup> Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, 1991), 3.

their bold strikes in the Tet Offensive, and saw during the 1972 Easter offensive ARVN's continued dependency on the United States.<sup>54</sup>

The pacification efforts of the Marine Corps, which had a tradition of such operations, have been cited by some of the hearts-and-minds revisionists as a model that should have been applied widely in Vietnam. Michael E. Peterson concurs, but with reservations. In *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam*, Peterson, a veteran of such operations in Vietnam, asserts that Westmoreland's application of the traditional army emphasis on warfare against "partisans" who are seen as dependent on an external country misinterpreted Vietnamese insurgency. The search-and-destroy strategy "declared war against peasant society [and] . . . the United States irrevocably lost that war." Peterson goes on to criticize the Marine Corps leadership for failing to devote greater manpower to the pacification and to document a record of success disproportionate to the limited commitment. Yet he also concludes that a nationwide program would not have been successful; at best, firepower "with an eye to protecting—rather than disrupting—the hamlets [meant that] we would not have lost the war so terribly as we did."<sup>55</sup>

Robert Chandler's study of U.S. propaganda programs, *War of Ideas*, likewise suggests the enormity, if not the impossibility, of the American challenge in the countryside. In 1965 the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) effectively became the information agency of the Saigon government and managed a prodigious outpouring of printed communications (at the rate of fifteen hundred for every Vietnamese) as well as radio and television programming to all parts of the country. Most JUSPAO propaganda was directed toward enlisting Southern support for the Saigon government and undermining the morale and credibility of the Vietcong. The results were disappointing, in part because JUSPAO's personnel were poorly trained and culturally insensitive, in part because its propaganda was not targeted to specific groups. In a larger sense, the propaganda campaign failed precisely because it was an American, not a Vietnamese, program.<sup>56</sup>

The most systematic, and controversial, pacification effort was the Phoenix program, which became a cornerstone of Vietnamization. Criticized as amounting to a program of political assassination and defended by officials led by William Colby and Robert Komer as a model that ought to have been employed earlier, the program has received reasonably balanced appraisals from Stuart Herrington and Dale Andrade. Both see it as making significant inroads against the Vietcong but also as limited by the long-standing hostility between the South Vietnamese government and the rural population. In *Silence Was a Weapon*, Herrington, who served in 1971–72 as a Phoenix program officer in Hau Nghia Province west of Saigon, contends that the Phoenix operation was generally discriminating and successful in terms of

<sup>54</sup>James Walker Trullinger, *Village at War: An Account of Revolution in Vietnam* (New York, 1980).

<sup>55</sup>Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (Westport, 1989), 19, 125.

<sup>56</sup>Robert W. Chandler, *War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam* (Boulder, 1981).

eliminating the Vietcong infrastructure, but it was undermined by the resistance and corruption of South Vietnamese officials and the resultant cynicism of the peasantry toward the Saigon government. Andrade's *Ashes to Ashes* details several Phoenix operations between 1968 and 1971 and finds that they decimated the Vietcong infrastructure at the village level, only to be limited by the hostility of South Vietnamese provincial officials' hostility to it and by the shift toward conventional warfare, which made pacification less relevant.<sup>57</sup>

The Land-to-the-Tiller program constituted another belated effort at securing Saigon's rural base of support. Charles Callison's field-research based study of the program from 1971 to 1974 in relatively secure, pro-government Mekong Delta villages concludes that it brought social and economic changes that enhanced political stability.<sup>58</sup>

If there is one thing on which virtually all accounts agree it is that the United States faced a determined enemy. Although documentation is limited, several works have made use of existing materials to examine Hanoi's strategy and its implementation. In compiling *Portrait of the Enemy*, David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai interviewed Vietnamese refugees, including Vietcong and North Vietnamese army veterans, and drew upon recorded interrogations of prisoners. In a book in which participants in the war do most of the talking, Chanoff and Toai conclude that although the Communist leadership engaged in "utter ruthlessness and massive social manipulation," it succeeded because of "the nature of the human material it had to work with" and its compelling patriotic vision. Hundreds of thousands displayed a "quixotic disregard for the impossible . . . throw[ing] themselves into the perils, accepting the terrible risks in exchange for a very distant glimpse of something better."<sup>59</sup> Drawing principally upon RAND Corporation interviews with prisoners of war and defectors, Michael Lanning and Dan Cragg, in *Inside the VC and the NVA*, similarly underscore the effectiveness of North Vietnam's tactics, logistics, recruitment, and organization. Attention to the military basics resulted in a mobile, committed, disciplined, and well-equipped fighting force.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Stuart A. Herrington, *Silence Was a Weapon: The Vietnam War in the Villages. A Personal Perspective* (Novato, CA, 1982); Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, MA, 1990). For recent criticisms of the Phoenix program see Zolin Grant, *Facing the Phoenix: The CIA and the Political Defeat of the United States in Vietnam* (New York, 1991); and Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (New York, 1990).

In *Lost Victory and the Bureaucracy at Work*, Colby and Komer, respectively, argue that the Phoenix program illustrated how the war could have been won earlier and at greatly reduced costs. Had the United States given priority to pacification during the 1955–1963 period and had it not betrayed the South's most effective leader, Ngo Dinh Diem, the Vietcong would not have been able to build their considerable strength in the rural areas. Defending the Phoenix program that he directed against charges that it amounted to little more than a campaign of terrorism and political assassination, Colby sees the ends justifying the means. The CIA and the South Vietnamese accomplished what the army's search-and-destroy ignored: the need to confront the Communist insurgents on their own terms. Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder, 1986); William E. Colby, *Lost Victory: A First Hand Account of America's Sixteen Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago, 1989).

<sup>58</sup>Charles Stuart Callison, *Land-to-the-Tiller in the Mekong Delta: Economic, Social and Political Effects of Land Reform in Four Villages of South Vietnam* (Lanham, MD, 1983).

<sup>59</sup>David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *Portrait of the Enemy* (New York, 1986), 209.

<sup>60</sup>Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (New York, 1992).

Several works trace the reason for the Communist success to an effective integration of political and military strategy that built on a nationalist tradition. The principal contribution of Gabriel Kolko's massive *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* is its analysis of "the Revolution's" political-military strategy against an American intervention that was driven by the need to control revolutionary regimes in the Third World. Kolko contrasts America's imprecise objectives and mindless warfare and the attendant shallowness of the South Vietnamese regime with the North's dedicated and disciplined cadres and the mass mobilization that characterized Northern society. If the North's victory was inevitable, it was facilitated by the limits placed on the use of American power, a fact plainly evident in how the war's devastating effect on the U.S. economy forced deescalation. The Tet Offensive, while costing the Communist forces heavily, guaranteed that they would not be defeated.<sup>61</sup>

William Duiker's *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* offers a similar, but more even handed, appraisal of Hanoi's response to American warfare and ultimate victory. The groundwork was laid by the Communist party's ability to organize and direct an insurgency that exploited "the pervasive sense of malaise through[out] South Vietnamese society, the legacy of a generation of failure by successive governments to build the foundations of a viable non-Communist state." The ultimate success of the Communist party resulted from its commitment to a comprehensive strategy of people's war that linked nationalism with social reform and built on the leadership of Ho Chi Minh—"an unusual composite of moral leader and organizational genius, half Gandhi, half Lenin."<sup>62</sup>

Douglas Pike, although decidedly not sympathetic to the Communists, also writes respectfully of their success in unconventional warfare, which he attributes to a capacity to exploit the enemy's weakness and to integrate political-military strategy. The latter, labeled Dau Tranh, a "strategy for which there is no known counterstrategy," eliminated distinctions between combatants and civilians and prolonged the struggle to dishearten the enemy. But despite the cogency of the strategy, Pike, unlike Kolko, rejects any suggestion that it assured victory. He embraces instead a revisionist perspective, similar to that of Lomperts in *The War Everyone Lost—and Won*, that the war was more "lost" by Americans than "won" by the North Vietnamese. The Americans and South Vietnamese, he argues, won the armed struggle because ARVN was still intact by 1975, but the "political dau tranh gauntlet was never actually picked up; no comprehensive counterstrategy was ever developed, and the effort that was made failed."<sup>63</sup>

Dismissing Pike's work as a "not very promising venture into Vietnamese metaphysics" and contending that Western scholars generally have paid insufficient attention to the People's Army, Greg Lockhart, in *Nation in Arms*, traces the simultaneous evolution of the political and military arms of Vietnamese nationalism from 1940 to 1954. In a situation where struggle was

<sup>61</sup>Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York, 1985).

<sup>62</sup>William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, 1981), 319, 323.

<sup>63</sup>Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA, 1986), 55, 127, 251.

the only way to attain nationhood, the army played a central role in defining the power of the state. Detailing the history of the army from its origins in the World War II guerrilla bases and the August revolution to its integrative role in the subsequent struggle against the French culminating at Dien Bien Phu, Lockhart finds that not only did the People's Army "[grow] as a manifestation as well as an instrument of the *legitimate* power of the Vietnamese nation-state" but that it was also "the central reason for the outcome of the Vietnam War."<sup>64</sup>

Ken Post's multivolume *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Viet Nam*, although written with certain acknowledged biases, offers a remarkably comprehensive overview of the revolution, which was a struggle for both liberation and social transformation and which the United States sought to contain. Offering what he describes as "an independent Marxist viewpoint," Post criticizes most other Western analyses of Vietnamese nationalism for being unsympathetic toward communism and contends that R. B. Smith's international history minimizes the internal forces that led to conflict. While stressing the development of the Vietnamese Communist party, Post also emphasizes its relationship to China and the Soviet Union, which provided political and material support and, equally important, ideological guidance. Indeed, the ideological connection is central to Post's view of the Vietnamese revolution's significance. "The Hanoi leaders['] . . . skill in combining Marxist-Leninist internationalism with . . . Vietnamese patriotism," he argues, "made theirs the quintessential national liberation movement of the twentieth century."<sup>65</sup>

Post's fourth volume, *The Failure of Counter-Insurgency, 1961-1965*, is the only one devoted principally to U.S. involvement. Predictably, Post foresees U.S. efforts as effectively futile. Like some revisionists, Post faults the American military leadership's emphasis on the military, and not on the economic, component of counterinsurgency and argues that the overthrow of the Diem regime was a major mistake in terms of U.S. interests. Yet the American ability to influence the situation was limited, for historical developments were working to the advantage of the Communist revolution. Despite his bias and Marxist fondness for an endless sequence of "con-tradictions," Post offers a substantial analysis of Hanoi's worldview and its response to changes inside and beyond Vietnam.<sup>66</sup>

With the opening of more documents and the coming of more reflective scholarship, the literature on the Vietnam War will refine some of the contentions dividing the neo-orthodox and revisionist views, and eventually a fuller synthesis will emerge. The more conspiratorial and "if only" aspects of revisionism traditionally are relegated to the fringes of scholarship, and that will likely be true in the case of the writing on the Vietnam War. The

<sup>64</sup>Greg Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam* (Wellington, Australia, 1991), 1, 11 (emphasis in original).

<sup>65</sup>Ken Post, *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Viet Nam*, Vol. 1, *An Interrupted Revolution* (Aldershot, England, 1989), xiii; Vol. 4, *The Failure of Counter-Insurgency in the South, 1961-1965* (Aldershot, England, 1990), 324.

<sup>66</sup>Post, *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Viet Nam*, Vol. 2, *Viet Nam South, 1961-1965* (Aldershot, England, 1989); Vol. 3, *Socialism in Half a Country* (Aldershot, England, 1989).

Clausewitzians' prescription for retrospective victory has been criticized for minimizing the Vietnamese and international politics of the war, but their attention to a variety of command, logistical, and bureaucratic problems is likely to remain a part of the military histories. Likely also to have a lasting impact is the hearts-and-minders' indictment of the military leadership's approach to the war and of the flawed approach to pacification. The legitimacists should force fuller attention to the range of competing international interests at stake in Vietnam (which rarely receives much attention in neo-orthodox accounts) and to the "better side" of the Diem government, but whether they will convince future scholars to embrace the conclusions that the international situation demanded U.S. military intervention or that Diem deserved unswerving U.S. support is more problematic. The useful work done thus far on the Vietnamese "sides" speaks to the need for more research on the wide range of social, political, economic, and military issues that helped to define and shape the struggle. Such scholarship will underscore that the conflict was a "long war . . . a trauma . . . an ordeal . . . a tragedy" even more for Vietnamese than for Americans. Only then can historians approach a genuine synthesis that addresses one of the major events of the twentieth century in its Vietnamese, American, and international dimensions.

## FEATURE REVIEW

### Ties That Bind: A Century of U.S.-Philippine Relations

STEPHEN R. SHALOM

H. W. Brands. *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines, 1890-1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. xii + 384 pp. Notes, index. \$25.00.

H. W. Brands reminds us that during the last hundred years the United States has had a greater impact on the world than has any other country and that Filipinos have felt that impact more directly than probably any other people (p. x). It is thus no surprise that there has been a vast literature examining the U.S.-Philippine relationship.<sup>1</sup> The latest scholarly contribution to this field is Brands's *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines*.

Few of the many books on U.S.-Philippine relations match Brands's accomplishment of covering the full history from the turn of the century to the administration of Corazon Aquino. Stanley Karnow's Pulitzer Prize-winning *In Our Image* had the same range (treating the Spanish period as well), but it frustrated scholars with its bibliographic essay in place of more precise documentation and was flawed by a certain mushiness of analysis.<sup>2</sup> That McKinley could not find the Philippines on a map<sup>3</sup>—if true—does not show that the American acquisition of the islands was "inadvertent"<sup>4</sup> any more than the fact that National Security Adviser William P. Clark's inability to name the capitals of various countries meant that he could not authorize worldwide covert operations. Yes, Roosevelt's orders to Dewey to proceed to Manila

<sup>1</sup>For an introduction to the literature see Glenn Anthony May, "The State of Philippine-American Studies," in *A Past Recovered* (Quezon City, 1987), originally published in *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* 10 (October-December 1982): 11-31; and the bibliography in David Joel Steinberg, *The Philippines: A Singular and a Plural Place* (Boulder, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York, 1989).  
<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 11, 87, 100, 104.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 166.