LESSONS OF HISTORY AND LESSONS OF VIETNAM

by

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One of the few unequivocally sound lessons of history is that the lessons we should learn are usually learned imperfectly if at all.

—Bernard Brodie[1]

Trying to use the lessons of the past correctly poses two dilemmas. One is the problem of balance: knowing how much to rely on the past as a guide and how much to ignore it. The other is the problem of selection: certain lessons drawn from experience contradict others.

—Richard Betts[2]

Of all the disasters of Vietnam, the worst may be the "lessons" that we'll draw from it. . . . Lessons from such complex events require much reflection to be of more than negative worth. But reactions to Vietnam . . . tend to be visceral rather than reflective.

—Albert Wohlstetter[3]

Of all the disasters of Vietnam the worst could be our unwillingness to learn enough from them.

—Stanley Hoffman[4]

In seeking solutions to problems, occupants of high office frequently turn to the past for help. This tendency is understandable; potentially, history is an enormously rich resource. What was done before in seemingly similar situations and what the results were can be of great assistance to policymakers. As this article contends, however, it is important to recognize that history can mislead and obfuscate as well as guide and illuminate. Lessons of the past, in general, and the lessons of Vietnam, in particular, contain not only policy-relevant analogies, but also ambiguities and paradoxes. Despite such problems, however, there is mounting evidence that lessons and analogies drawn from history often play an important part in policy decisions.[5]

Political scientists, organizational psychologists, and historians have assembled considerable evidence suggesting that one reason decision-makers behave as they do is that they are influenced by lessons they have derived from certain events in the past, especially traumatic events during their lifetimes. "Hardly anything is more important in international affairs," writes Paul Kattenburg, "than the historical images and perceptions that men carry in their heads."[6] These images constitute an important part of the "intellectual baggage" that policymakers carry into office and draw on when making decisions.

Use of history in this way is virtually universal. As diplomatic historian Ernest May has pointed out, "Eagerness to profit from the lessons of history is the one common characteristic in the statecraft of such diverse types as Stanley Baldwin, Adolf Hitler, Charles de Gaulle, and John F. Kennedy." Each was "determined to hear the voices of history, to avoid repeating the presumed mistakes of the past."[7] President Reagan appears to be similarly influenced by the past. His "ideas about the world flow from his

life," *The New York Times*' Leslie Gelb contends, "from personal history . . . a set of convictions lodged in his mind as maxims."[8]

Perceived lessons of the past have been found to be especially important during crises. When a sudden international development threatens national security interests and requires a quick response, leaders are prone to draw on historical analogies in deciding how to proceed. Indeed, several studies have concluded that "the greater the crisis, the greater the propensity for decision-makers to supplement information about the objective state of affairs with information drawn from their own past experiences."[9]

The use of historical analogies by statesmen, however, frequently is flawed. Many scholars concur with Ernest May's judgment that "policy-makers ordinarily use history badly."[10] Numerous pitfalls await those who seek guidance from the past, and policymakers have seemed adept at finding them. Those who employ history, therefore, should be aware of the common fallacies to which they may fall victim. As Alexis de Tocqueville warned, misapplied lessons of history may be more dangerous than ignorance of the past.[11]

The first error that policymakers frequently commit when employing history is to focus unduly on a particularly dramatic or traumatic event which they experienced personally.[12] The last war or the most recent crisis assumes unwarranted importance in the mind of the decision-maker seeking historical precedents to illuminate the present. This inclination often is unfounded. There is little reason why those events that occurred during the lifetime of a particular leader and thus provide ready analogies should in fact be the best guides to the present or future. Just because the decision-maker happened to experience the last war is no reason that it, rather than earlier wars, should provide guidance for the contemporary situation.[13]

The fallacy of viewing personal historical experience as most relevant to the present—without carefully considering alternative sources of comparison—is compounded by a tendency to remove analogies from their unique contextual circumstances. Having seized on the first analogy that comes to mind, in too many instances policymakers do not search more widely. Nor, contends Ernest May, "do they pause to analyze the case, test its fitness, or even ask in what ways it might be misleading."[14] Historical outcomes are thus absorbed without paying careful attention to the details of their causation, and the result is lessons that are superficial and overgeneralized, analogies applied to a wide range of events with little sensitivity to variations in the situation.[15] The result is policy made, in Arthur Schlesinger's words, through "historical generalization wrenched illegitimately out of the past and imposed mechanically on the future."[16]

Finally, once persuaded that a particular event or phenomenon is repeating itself, policymakers are prone to narrow their thinking, seeing only those facts that conform to the image they have chosen as applicable. Contradictory information is filtered out. "As new information is received," observes Lloyd Jensen, "an effort is made to interpret that information so that it will be compatible with existing images and beliefs."[17]

In sum, lessons of the past are not always used wisely. Proper employment of history has been the exception rather than the rule. Historical analogies often are poorly chosen and overgeneralized. Their contextual circumstances frequently are overlooked. Traumatic personal experiences often exercise unwarranted tyranny over the minds of decision-makers. History is so often misused

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by policymakers, in fact, that many historians agree with Arthur Schlesinger's inversion of Santayana: "Those who *can* remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[18]

THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM

It is not surprising that lessons taken from America's experience in Indochina have influenced the views and advice of US military leaders on virtually all post-Vietnam security crises in which the use of force was considered. This has been particularly evident in those cases where the similarities to US involvement in Indochina have been perceived to be most striking, such as the debate over American policy toward Central America.[19]

The frustrating experience of Vietnam is indelibly etched in the minds of America's senior military officers, and from it they seem to have taken three general lessons. First, the military has drawn from Vietnam a reminder of the finite limits of American public support for US involvement in a protracted conflict. This awareness was not, of course, a complete revelation to all in the military. Among the 20th-century wars the United States entered, only World War II enjoyed overwhelming support.[20] As early as the 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville had observed that democracies—America's in particular—were better suited for "a sudden effort of remarkable vigor, than for the prolonged endurance of the great storms that beset the political existence of nations." Democracies, he noted, do not await the consequences of important undertakings with patience.[21]

After World War II, General George C. Marshall echoed that judgment, warning that "a democracy cannot fight a Seven Years War."[22] Yet such prescient observations as de Tocqueville's and Marshall's were temporarily overlooked; and, for those in the military, Vietnam was an extremely painful reaffirmation that when it comes to intervention, time and patience are not American virtues in abundant supply.

Second, the military has taken from Vietnam (and the concomitant repercussions in the Pentagon) a heightened awareness that civilian officials are responsive to influences other than the objective conditions on the battlefield.[23] A consequence has been an increase in traditional military suspicions about politicians and political appointees. This generalization, admittedly, does not hold true across the board and has diminished somewhat in the past few years. Nonetheless, while the military still accepts emphatically the constitutional provision for civilian control of the armed forces,[24] there remain from the Vietnam era nagging doubts about the abilities and motivations of politicians. The military came away from Vietnam feeling, in particular, that the civilian leadership had not understood the conduct of military operations, had lacked the willingness to see things through, and frequently had held different perceptions about what was really important.[25] Vietnam was also a painful reminder that the military, not the transient occupants of high office, generally bears the heaviest burden during armed conflict. Vietnam gave new impetus to what Samuel Huntington described in the 1950s as the military's pacifist attitude. The military man, he wrote, "tends to see himself as the perennial victim of civilian warmongering. It is the people and the politicians, public opinion and governments who start wars. It is the military who have to fight them."[26] As retired General William A. Knowlton told members of the Army War College class of 1985: "Remember one lesson from the Vietnam era: Those who ordered the meal were not there when the waiter brought the check."[27]

Finally, the military took from Vietnam a new recognition of the limits of military power in solving certain types of problems in world affairs. In particular, Vietnam planted doubts in many military minds about the ability of US forces to conduct successful large-scale counterinsurgencies. These misgivings do not in all cases spring from doubts about the capabilities of American troops and units per se; even in Vietnam, military leaders recall, US units never lost a battle. Rather, the doubts that are part of the Vietnam legacy spring from a number of interrelated factors:

worries about a lack of popular support for what the public might perceive as ambiguous conflicts;[28] the previously mentioned suspicions about the willingness of politicians—not just those in the executive branch—to stay the course;[29] and lurking fears that the respective services have yet to come to grips with the difficult tasks of developing the doctrine, equipment, and forces suitable for nasty little wars.[30]

These lessons have had a chastening effect on military thinking. A more skeptical attitude is brought to the analysis of possible missions. "We've thrown over the old 'can-do' idea," an Army Colonel at Fort Hood told *The New York Times*' Drew Middleton. "Now we want to know exactly what they want us to do and how they think we can accomplish it." Henceforth, senior military officers seem to feel, the United States should not engage in war unless it has a clear idea why it is fighting and is prepared to see the war through to a successful conclusion.[31]

Vietnam also increased the military inclination toward the "all or nothing" type of advice that characterized military views during the Eisenhower Administration's deliberations in 1954 over intervention in Dien Bien Phu and the Kennedy Administration's discussions over intervention in Laos in 1961. There is a conviction that when it comes to the use of force, America should either bite the bullet or duck, but not nibble.[32] "Once we commit force," cautions Army Chief of Staff General John Wickham, "we must be prepared to back it up as opposed to just sending soldiers into operations for limited goals."[33] Furthermore, noted Wickham's predecessor, General Edward C. Meyer, before his retirement in 1983, commanders must be "given a freer hand in waging war than they had in Vietnam."[34] In this view, if the United States is to intervene, it should do so in strength, accomplish its objectives rapidly, and withdraw as soon as conditions allow.

Additionally, the public must be made aware of the costs up front. Force must be committed only when there is a consensus of understanding among the American people that the effort is in the best interests of the United States.[35] There is a belief that "Congress should declare war whenever large numbers of U.S. troops engage in sustained combat," and that the American people must be mobilized because "a nation cannot fight in cold blood."[36] Since time is crucial, furthermore, sufficient force must be used at the outset to ensure that the conflict can be resolved before the American people withdraw their support for it.[37]

Finally, Vietnam has led the senior military to believe that in the future, political leaders must better define objectives before putting soldiers at risk. "Don't send military forces off to do anything unless you know what it is clearly that you want done," warned then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General John Vessey in 1983. "I am absolutely, unalterably opposed to risking American lives for some sort of military and political objectives that we don't understand."[38]

In short, rather than preparing to fight the last war, as generals and admirals are often accused of doing, contemporary military leaders seem far more inclined to avoid any involvement overseas that could become another Vietnam. The lessons taken from Vietnam work to that end; military support for the use of force abroad is contingent on the presence of specific preconditions chosen with an eye to avoiding a repetition of the US experience in Southeast Asia.

USING THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM

The lessons of Vietnam as drawn by American military leaders do, however, have their limitations. While they represent the distillation of considerable wisdom from America's experience in Indochina, they nonetheless give rise to certain paradoxical prescriptions and should not be pushed beyond their limits. As this section will show, total resolution of the paradoxes that reside in the lessons of Vietnam is not possible, nor should it be expected given the nature of world events and domestic politics. Nonetheless, awareness of the limitations of the lessons of Vietnam is necessary if they are to be employed with sound judgment.

Users of the lessons of Vietnam should, first of all, recognize and strive to avoid the general pitfalls that await anyone who seeks useful analogies in the past. Most important, the fact that Vietnam was America's most recent major military engagement is no reason that it, rather than earlier conflicts, should be most relevant to future conflicts. Senior officials should remember the contextual circumstances of American involvement in Vietnam—the social fragmentation there, the leadership void, the difficult political situation, the geostrategic position, and so forth. They would be wise to recall Stanley Karnow's reminder that each foreign event "has its own singularities, which must be confronted individually and creatively. To see every crisis as another Vietnam is myopic, just as overlaying the Munich debacle on Vietnam was a distortion."[39] Hence specific guidelines for the use of force that draw on Vietnam, such as those discussed earlier and those announced by Secretary of Defense Weinberger,[40] should be applied with discrimination to specific cases and their circumstances, rather than in the rote manner that one-line principles of war are sometimes employed.

Policymakers employing the lessons of Vietnam, or the lessons of any other past event, should resist the American tendency for over-generalization.[41] For if nothing else, Vietnam should teach that global, holistic approaches do not work.[42] In short, when drawing on the lessons of Vietnam, senior officers would do well to recall the advice of Mark Twain:

> We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it—and stop there; lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again—and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one.[43]

Beyond recognizing such general pitfalls that can snare users of historical analogies, military leaders also should be aware of the paradoxes that reside in certain of the prescriptions derived from the lessons of Vietnam. In particular, the guidelines taken from America's experience in Vietnam contain a significant dilemma about when to use force, appear to embody a potentially counterproductive approach to civil-military relations, and create a quandary over counterinsurgency doctrine and force structuring.

As explained earlier, many military leaders have concluded on the basis of the Vietnam experience that the United States should not intervene abroad militarily unless: there is support at home; there are clear political and military objectives; success appears achievable within a reasonable time; and military commanders will be given the freedom to do what they believe is necessary to achieve that success. The problem with such guidelines, as Robert Osgood has observed, is that "acting upon them presupposes advance knowledge about a complicated interaction of military and political factors that no one can predict or guarantee."[44]

Still, making judgments about such factors has always been part of decisions to use military force. Statesmen and soldiers have always had to assess the time and force required for success, the likelihood of public support, and the potential gains and losses associated with any particular intervention or escalation. Eliminating the uncertainty inherent in such determinations has never been completely possible. But Vietnam and the relative decline in US power (and hence America's margin for error in international politics) over the past two decades have heightened the importance of these judgments and made them more problematic. The normal response to this kind of uncertainty is—and has been—caution and restraint.

Restraint rests uneasily, however, alongside another lesson of Vietnam: that if the United States is going to intervene it should do so quickly and massively in order to arrive in force while the patient still has strong vital signs.[45] But getting there faster next time implies making the decision to intervene in force early on. It requires overwhelming commitment from the outset so that, as George Fielding Eliot prescribes, "we

shall . . . look like military winners from the start of hostilities" and thereby "win popular support at home and confidence abroad." The American effort, therefore, should be designed to raise immediate doubt that the United States will permit a war to become protracted.[46]

Eliot does not specify, however, how long the appearance of winning will satisfy the American public in the absence of actual victory. Furthermore, getting there earlier next time is more easily said than done. Several post-Vietnam (and post-Watergate) developments—the 1973 War Powers Act, the decline of the "imperial presidency," increased congressional involvement in national security policy, and public wariness over involvement in another quagmire—pose obstacles to swift American action. Coupled with the short-term focus of political leaders and the constitutional separation of powers, these new phenomena (at least in post-World War II terms) make it difficult for the United States to decide early to intervene in any but the most clear-cut of circumstances. It usually takes what can be presented as a crisis before the United States is able to swing into action. The result is the oft-heard judgment that America is good at fighting only crusades.

Military leaders are, of course, well aware of the obstacles to early intervention. They realize that these obstacles, together with America's general inclination against involvement in situations that pose only an indirect threat to US interests, have the potential for incomplete public backing. As a result, senior military officers tend toward caution rather than haste, all the while cognizant of the dilemma confronting them: the country that hesitates may miss the opportune moment for effective action, while the country that acts in haste may become involved in a conflict that it may wish later it had avoided.

Another difficulty posed by the lessons drawn from the Vietnam experience centers on the issue of civil-military relations. During the Vietnam era, the traditional military suspicions of civilians hardened into more acute misgivings about civilian officials. This feeling lingers despite the apparently close philosophical ties on the use of force between the incumbent Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[47]

Yet such misgivings pose potential risks. Two post-World War II developments at either end of the so-called "spectrum of conflict," the advent of nuclear weapons and the rise of insurgencies, have made close civil-military integration more essential than ever before.

Counterinsurgency operations, in particular, require close civil-military cooperation. Unfortunately, this requirement runs counter to the traditional military desire, reaffirmed in the lessons of Vietnam, to operate autonomously and resist political meddling and micromanagement in operational concerns. Military officers are of course intimately aware of Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means; many, however, do not appear to accept fully the implications of Clausewitzian logic. This can cause problems, for while military resistance to political micromanagement is often well founded, it can, if carried to excess, be counterproductive. As Eliot Cohen has noted:

> Small war almost always involves political interference in the affairs of the country in which it is waged; it is in the very nature of such wars that the military problems are difficult to distinguish from the political ones. The skills of manipulation which successful coalition warfare in such circumstances requires are not only scarce, but in some measure anathema to the American military. The desire of the American military to handle only pure "military" problems is . . . understandable in light of its Vietnam experience, but unrealistic nonetheless.[48]

Hence, particularly in such "small wars," military leaders should not allow the experience of Vietnam to reinforce the traditional military desire for autonomy in a way that impedes the crucial integration of political and military strategies. The organizational desire to be left alone must not lead those who bear the sword to lose their appreciation for the political and economic

context in which it is wielded. For while military force may be necessary in certain cases, it is seldom sufficient.[49]

Another paradox posed by the lessons of Vietnam concerns preparations for counterinsurgency warfare. The Vietnam experience left the military leadership feeling that they should advise against involvement in counterinsurgencies unless specific, perhaps unlikely, circumstances obtain. Committing US units to such contingencies appears a starkly problematic step—difficult to conclude before domestic support erodes and potentially so costly as to threaten the well-being of all of America's military forces (and hence the country's national security), not just those involved in the actual counterinsurgency. Senior military officers remember that Vietnam cost not only tens of thousands of lives, but also a generation of investment in new weapons and other equipment.[50] Morale plummeted throughout the military, and relations between the military and society were soured for nearly a decade.

A logical extension of this reasoning is that forces designed specifically for counterinsurgencies should not be given high priority, since if there are no sizable forces suitable for counterinsurgencies it will be easier to avoid involvement in that type of conflict.[51] An American president cannot commit what is not available. Similarly, along this line of thinking, plans for such contingencies should not be pursued with too much vigor.[52]

There are two problems with such reasoning, however. First, presidents may commit the United States to a conflict whether optimum forces exist or not. President Truman's decision to commit American ground troops to the defense of South Korea in 1950, for example, came as a surprise to military officers, who expected to execute a previously approved contingency plan that called for withdrawal of all American troops from the Korean peninsula in the event of an invasion. The early reverses in the ensuing conflict resulted in large measure from inadequate military readiness for such a mission.[53] So, prudence requires a certain flexibility in forces, especially if the overall national strategy opens the possibility of involvement in operations throughout the spectrum of conflict (as it presently appears to do). If commitment to counterinsurgency operations is possible, the military should be prepared for it.

The second problem posed by such reasoning is that American involvement in counterinsurgencies is almost universally regarded as more likely than involvement in most other types of combat—more likely, for example, than involvement in high-intensity conflict on the plains of NATO's Central Region (though, of course, conflict in Europe potentially would have more significant consequences).[54] Indeed, the United States is already involved in counterinsurgencies, albeit not with US combat troops. American military trainers in El Salvador are assisting an ally combatting an insurgency, and, depending on one's definitions, US military elements are also providing assistance to a number of other countries fighting insurgents, among them, Chad, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Morocco, Peru, the Philippines, Sudan, and Thailand.

The senior military is thus in a dilemma. The lessons taken from Vietnam would indicate that, in general, involvement in a counterinsurgency should be avoided. But prudent preparation for a likely contingency (and a general inclination against limiting a president's options) lead the military to recognize that significant emphasis should be given to counterinsurgency forces, equipment, and doctrine. Military leaders are thereby in the difficult position of arguing for the creation of more forces suitable for such conflicts, while simultaneously realizing they may advise against the use of those forces unless very specific circumstances hold.[55]

Until recently the inclination against involvement in counterinsurgencies seemed to outweigh the need for a sufficient counterinsurgent capability. Relatively little emphasis was given to preparation for this form of conflict, either in assisting other governments to help themselves or in developing American capabilities for more direct involvement.

There has been developing, however, gradual recognition that involvement in small wars is not only likely, it is upon us. It would seem wise, therefore, to come to grips with what appears to be an emerging fact for the US military, that American involvement in low-intensity conflict is unavoidable given the more assertive US foreign policy of recent years and the developments in many Third World countries, particularly those in our own hemisphere. It would be timely to seek ways to assist allies in counterinsurgency operations, ways consistent with the constraints of the American political culture and system, as well as with the institutional agendas of the military services.[56] One conclusion may be that in some cases, contrary to the lessons of Vietnam, it would be better to use American soldiers in small numbers than in strength to help a foreign government counter insurgents. Indeed, given the example of congressional limits on the number of trainers in El Salvador, the Army in particular should be figuring out how best to assist others within what might be anticipated as similar limits in other situations, while always remembering that it is the host country's war to win or lose.

Given that conclusion, the military should look beyond critiques of American involvement in Vietnam that focus exclusively on alternative conventional military strategies that might have been pursued. For all their value, such studies seldom address important unconventional elements of struggles such as Vietnam (although, of course, what eventually defeated South Vietnam was a massive invasion by North Vietnam forces) and several contemporary theaters. As Professor John Gates wrote in a 1984 *Parameters* article,

> Any analysis that denies the important revolutionary dimension of the Vietnam conflict is misleading, leaving the American people, their leaders, and their professionals inadequately prepared to deal with similar problems in the future . . . . Instead of forcing the military to come to grips with the problems of revolutionary warfare that now exist in nations such as Guatemala or El Salvador, [such an] analysis leads officers back into the conventional war model that provided so little preparation for solving the problems faced in Indochina by the French, the Americans, and their Vietnamese allies. Such a business-as-usual approach is much too complacent in a world plagued by the unconventional warfare associated with revolution and attempts to counter it.[57]

The most serious charge leveled at the lessons of Vietnam is made by those who perceive them as promising national paralysis in the face of international provocation. This contention is also the most difficult to contend with because of its generality. The argument is that insistence upon domestic consensus before employing US forces is too demanding a requirement—that if it were rigorously applied it would, in the words of former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, "virtually assure other powers that they can count on not facing American forces." Schlesinger goes on to explain:

> The likeliest physical challenges to the United States come in the third world—not in Europe or North America. If the more predatory states in the third world are given assurance that they can employ, directly or indirectly, physical force against American interests with impunity, they will feel far less restraint in acting against our interests. Americans historically have embraced crusades—such as World War II—as well as glorious little wars. The difficulty is that the most likely conflicts of the future fall between crusades and such brief encounters as Grenada and Mayaguez. Yet these in-between conflicts have weak public support. Even . . . with national unity and at the height of our power public enthusiasm for Korea and Vietnam evaporated in just a year or two. The problem is that virtually no opportunity exists for future crusades—and those glorious wars are likely to occur infrequently. The role of the United States in the world is such that it must be prepared for, be prepared to threaten, and even be prepared to fight those intermediate conflicts—that are likely to fare poorly on television.[58]

As Schlesinger was quick to acknowledge, however, there is no ready solution to the perplexities he described. Nor are there clear-cut solutions to the other ambiguities that reside in the lessons of Vietnam. The only certainty seems to be that searching reflection about what ought to be taken from America's experience in Vietnam should continue, for only with further examination will thoughtful understanding replace visceral revulsion when we think about America's difficulties in Vietnam.

CONCLUSIONS

History in general, and the American experience in Vietnam in particular, have much to teach us, but both must be used with discretion and neither should be pushed too far.[59] In particular, the Vietnam analogy, for all its value as the most recent large-scale use of American force abroad, has limits. The applicability of the lessons drawn from Vietnam, just like the applicability of lessons taken from any other past event, always will depend on the contextual circumstances. We should avoid the trap of considering only the Vietnam analogy, and not allow it to overshadow unduly other historical events that appear to offer insight and perspective.

Nor should Vietnam be permitted to become such a dominant influence in the minds of decision-makers that it inhibits the discussion of specific events on their own merits. It would be more profitable to address the central issues of any particular case that arises than to debate endlessly whether the situation could evolve into "another Vietnam." In their use of history politicians and military planners alike would do well to recall David Fischer's finding that "the utility of historical knowledge consists . . . in the enlargement of substantive contexts within which decisions are made, . . . in the refinement of a thought structure which is indispensible to purposeful decisionmaking."[60]

Thus we should beware literal application of lessons extracted from Vietnam, or any other past event, to present or future problems without due regard for the specific circumstances that surround those problems. Study of Vietnam—and of other historical occurrences—should endeavor to gain perspective and understanding, rather than hard and fast lessons that might be applied too easily without proper reflection and sufficiently rigorous analysis. "Each historical situation is unique," George Herring has warned, "and the use of analogy is at best misleading, at worst, dangerous."[61]

NOTES

1. Quoted in Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, *American Leadership in World Affairs* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 25.
2. Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 164.
3. Quoted in *No More Vietnams?* ed. by Richard M. Pfeffer (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 4.
4. Ibid., p. 6.
5. The best of the works that establish the influence of history on decision-makers is Ernest R. May's *"Lessons" of the Past* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978). Others include: Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), especially chapter six, "How Decision-Makers Learn From History"; Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980), pp. 42-53, 60-61; Stanley Karnow, "Vietnam As an Analogy," *The New York Times*, 4 October 1983, p. A27; and Holsti and Rosenau, pp. 3-10.
6. Paul M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-1975* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1980), p. 317.
7. Quoted in George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, p. 45.
8. Leslie H. Gelb, "The Mind of the President," *The New York Times Magazine*, 6 October 1985, p. 28.
9. Glenn D. Paige, "Comparative Case Analysis of Crisis Decisions: Korea and Cuba," in *International Crises: Insights From Behavioral Research*, ed. Charles F. Hermann (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 48. Paige's finding was confirmed in Michael Brecher, with Benjamin Geist, *Decisions in Crisis* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), p. 343.
10. May, *"Lessons" of the Past*, p. xi.
11. Cited in Holsti and Rosenau, *American Leadership in World Affairs*, p. 8.
12. See, for example, Abraham Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 161.
13. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p. 281.
14. May, *"Lessons" of the Past*, p. xi.
15. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p. 281.
16. Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1946* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Crest, 1967), p. 98.
17. Lloyd Jensen, *Explaining Foreign Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 39. See also May, *"Lessons" of the Past*, p. xi; Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention*, p. 162; and John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 65-71.

18. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, one-volume edition, 1953), p. 82. Schlesinger, *The Bitter Heritage*, p. 102.

19. See William J. Taylor and David H. Petraeus, "The Legacy of Vietnam for the American Military," in *Vietnam: Did It Make A Difference?* ed. George Osborn et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, forthcoming in 1986). See also: Richard Halloran, "Vietnam Consequences: Quiet From the Military," *The New York Times*, 2 May 1983, p. A16; Drew Middleton, "U.S. Generals Are Leery of Latin Intervention," *The New York Times*, 21 June 1983, p. A9; Walter S. Mossberg, "The Army Resists a Salvdoran Vietnam," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1983, p. 22; Joanne Omang, "New Army Chief Doesn't See Widening Latin Involvement," *The Washington Post*, 9 August 1983, p. A10; Philip Taubman, "General Doubts G.I. Role in Salvador," *The New York Times*, 2 August 1984, p. A3; Richard Halloran, "General Opposes Nicaragua Attacks," *The New York Times*, 30 June 1985, p. A3; and George C. Wilson, "Generals Who Contradict the Contras," *The Washington Post*, 13 April 1986, p. C2.

Military advice on the Marine peacekeeping mission in Lebanon also appeared to be influenced by the experience in Vietnam. See, for example, Steven V. Roberts, "War Powers Debate Reflects Its Origin," *The New York Times*, 2 October 1983, p. E4; Bill Keller, "Military Reportedly Opposed Use of U.S. Marines in Beirut," *The New York Times*, 22 August 1985, p. A6; Patrick J. Sloyan, "Lebanon: Anatomy of a Foreign Policy Failure," *Newsday*, 8 April 1984, pp. 4-5, 34-39; Roy Gutman, "Division at the Top Meant Half-Measures," *Newsday*, 8 April 1984, pp. 36-37; and William Greider, "Retreat From Beirut," an episode in the Public Broadcasting System series *Frontline*, shown on 26 February 1985.

20. See John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973), pp. 42-65, 168-75.

21. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), I, 237.

22. Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1959), p. 5.

23. See, for example, Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "Past As Prologue: Counterinsurgency and the U.S. Army's Vietnam Experience in Force Structuring and Doctrine," in *Vietnam: Did It Make A Difference?*

24. The overwhelming acceptance of civilian control is illustrated in "A *Newsweek* Poll: The Military Mind," *Newsweek*, 9 July 1984, p. 37.

25. See, for example, Victor H. Krulak, *Organization for National Security* (Washington: US Strategic Institute, 1983), pp. 81-102; Stephan P. Rosen, "Vietnam and the American Theory of Limited War," *International Security*, 7 (Fall 1982), 100-03; Krepinevich, "Past As Prologue"; and Frank A. Burdick, "Vietnam Revisioned: The Military Campaign Against Civilian Control," *Democracy*, 2 (January 1982), 36-52.

26. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 69-70.

27. William A. Knowlton, "Ethics and Decision-Making," address delivered at the US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., 22 October 1984, p. 28 of transcript (cited with permission of General Knowlton). Similarly, a "senior officer" told *The New York Times*' Richard Halloran: "We were the scapegoats of that conflict. We're the ones pulling back on the reins on [Central America]." Halloran, "Vietnam Consequences: Quiet From the Military," *The New York Times*, 2 May 1983, p. A16.

28. Thus retired General Maxwell Taylor described the "great difficulty in rallying this country behind a foreign issue involving the use of armed force, which does not provide an identified enemy posing a clear threat to our homeland or the vital interests of long time friends." See his "Post-Vietnam Role of the Military in Foreign Policy," in *Contemporary American Foreign and Military Policy*, ed. Burton M. Sapin (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1970), pp. 36-43. For similar views expressed by General John Vessey before his recent retirement from the post of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, see Richard Halloran, "Reflections on 46 Years of Army Service," *The New York Times*, 3 September 1985, p. A18.

29. As former Secretary of State Alexander Haig wrote: "The Joint Chiefs of Staff, chastened by Vietnam . . . resisted a major commitment in [Central America]. I sensed, and understood, a doubt on the part of the military in the political will of the civilians at the top to follow through to the end on such a commitment." See Haig's *Caveat* (New York: MacMillan, 1984), p. 128.

30. There appears to be a muted debate under way, particularly within the Army, over whether American forces should be used in counterinsurgency operations at all, and if so, how they should be structured. Some officers feel that US forces are not well suited for such operations. As one senior officer who commanded a battalion in Vietnam advised: "Remember, we're watchdogs you unchain to eat the burglar. Don't ask us to be mayors or sociologists worrying about hearts and minds. Let us eat up the burglar in our own way and then put us back on the leash." Quoted in George C. Wilson, "War's Lessons Struck Home," *The Washington Post*, 16 April 1985, p. A9. Similar sentiments were expressed by a Navy Admiral who advised the US Military Academy's 1985 Senior Conference that the primary task of the military is to put "ordnance on target." See John D. Morrocco, "Vietnam's Legacy: U.S. More Cautious In Using force," *Army Times*, 1 July 1985, p. 42. See also, the letter to the editor of *Military Review* by Francisco J. Pedrozo, 66 (January 1986), 81-82. Others worry that the American people will not support extended US involvement in a "small war." Lastly, there remain a few military officers who cling to the notion that no special capability is needed because big units can invariably handle small wars—that, in the words of General Curtis LeMay (Air Force Chief of Staff in the early 1960s), "If you can lick the cat, you can lick the kitten" (attributed to LeMay in William W. Kaufmann, "Force Planning and Vietnam," in *Vietnam: Did It Make a Difference?*).

31. Drew Middleton, "Vietnam and the Military Mind," *The New York Times*, 10 January 1982, p. 90. See also Richard Halloran, "For Military Leaders, the Shadow of Vietnam," *The New York Times*, 20 March 1984, p. B10.

One may ask whether American military leaders have not always held such views, and question, therefore, whether the so-called lessons of Vietnam are really anything new. This was the reaction of retired General Edward C. Meyer, former Army Chief of Staff, to a draft paper that discussed the lessons of Vietnam in a similar vein (Taylor and Petraeus, "The Legacy of Vietnam for the American Military"). Other senior officers have expressed similar sentiments when queried by journalists about the impact of Vietnam. General John Vessey on several occasions maintained that "his attitudes toward the use of military force were largely unaffected by the U.S. experience in Vietnam." See P. J. Budahn, "Vessey Sees Need to Ease Up-or-Out Policy," *Army Times*, 16 September 1985, pp. 4, 26; and Harry G. Summers, Jr., "American Military in 'A Race to Prevent War,' " *U.S. News and World Report*, 21 October 1985, p. 40.

32. Paraphrased from Richard K. Betts, "Misadventure Revisited," *The Wilson Quarterly*, 7 (Summer 1983), 99.

33. George C. Wilson, "War's Lessons Struck Home," *The Washington Post*, 16 April 1985, p. A9.

34. George C. Wilson, "Top U.S. Brass Wary on

Central America," *The Washington Post*, 24 June 1983, p. A20.

35. Bruce Palmer, *The 25-Year War* (Lexington, Ky.: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984), p. 204. See also the quotation of General Frederick C. Weyand in Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, 1981), p. 25.

36. Palmer, *The 25-Year War*, p. 194; and Wilson, "Top U.S. Brass Wary on Central America." In fact, it appears that senior Army leaders since Vietnam have sought an active component force that makes, in the words of former Army Chief of Staff Meyer, "except for the most modest contingency, a callup of Reserves . . . an absolute necessity." See the collection of General Meyer's speeches and articles published by the Department of the Army in 1983, p. 314. On this see also Michael R. Gordon, "The Charge of the Light Infantry—Army Plans Forces for Third World Conflict," *National Journal*, 19 May 1984, p. 972; and Summers, *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context*, p. 113.

37. Richard Halloran, "Reflections on 46 Years of Army Service," *The New York Times*, 3 September 1985, p. A18.

38. Richard Halloran, "A Commanding Voice for the Military," *The New York Times Magazine*, 15 July 1984, p. 52.

39. Stanley Karnow, "Vietnam As An Analogy," *The New York Times*, 4 October 1983, p. A27. On this point, see Hans Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 144. For an illustrative, though now somewhat dated, analysis of the differences between El Salvador and Vietnam, see George C. Herring, "Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Uses of History," in *The Central American Crisis*, ed. Kenneth M. Coleman and George C. Herring (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1985), pp. 97-110.

40. In a November 1984 speech titled "The Uses of Military Power," Secretary of Defense Weinberger outlined six tests that he said would apply when deciding whether to send military forces into combat abroad. His six tests are very similar to the lessons drawn by the military from Vietnam. See "Excerpts From Address of Weinberger," *The New York Times*, 29 November 1984, p. A5; and Richard Halloran, "U.S. Will Not Drift Into A Latin War, Weinberger Says," *The New York Times*, 29 November 1984, pp. A1, A4.

41. A recent article by George F. Kennan contained a similar admonishment. See his "Morality and Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, 64 (Winter 1985/86), 205-18.

42. Paul Kattenburg makes a particularly good case for this in *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-1975* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1980), p. 321.

43. Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899), p. 125.

44. Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War Revisited* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979), p. 50.

45. See, for example, George Fielding Eliot, "Next Time We'll Have to Get There Faster," *Army*, 20 (April 1970), 32-36.

46. Ibid., pp. 32-33.

47. The best example of these close philosophical ties is Secretary Weinberger's November 1984 speech, "The Uses of Military Power." See note 40.

48. Eliot A. Cohen, "Constraints on America's Conduct of Small Wars," *International Security*, 9 (Fall 1984), 170. Richard Betts has observed that American military leaders in Vietnam "recognized the political complexity of the war but insisted on dividing the labor, leaving the politics to the civilians and concentrating themselves on actual combat." See his *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 138.

49. Phrase suggested by Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Kaufman.

50. This sentiment is clearly evident, for example, in Halloran, "Vietnam Consequences: Quiet From the Military."

51. There is some evidence of such feelings. A recent article by Tom Donnelly in *Army Times* (1 July 1985, pp. 41-43), for example, was descriptively titled "Special Operations Still a Military Stepchild." See also "A Warrior Elite For the Dirty Jobs," *Time*, 13 January 1986, p. 18.

52. Some journalists reported that the military was slow in planning for contingencies in Central America. See George C. Wilson, "U.S. Urged to Meet Honduran Requests," *The Washington Post*, 20 June 1983, p. A4; and Doyle McManus, "U.S. Draws Contingency Plans for Air Strikes in El Salvador," *The Washington Post*, 13 July 1984, p. A27.

53. Joseph C. Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: Times Books, 1982), pp. 57-58; and T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: A Study of Unpreparedness* (New York: MacMillan, 1963). Senior military men took from Korea the necessity to have a force structure flexible enough to respond to such unanticipated decisions. See the comments of Lieutenant General Vernon Walters on this in Summers, *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context*, p. 120.

54. Among the many sources that make this point, see Robert H. Kupperman and William J. Taylor, eds. *Strategic Requirements for the Army to the Year 2000* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1984), esp. pp. 51-69, 125-42, and 171-86; Fred K. Mahaffey, "Structuring Forces to Need," *Army*, 34 (October 1984), 204-16; and Richard H. Shultz, Jr., and Alan N. Sabrosky, "Policy and Strategy for the 1980s: Preparing for Low Intensity Conflict," in *Lessons From an Unconventional War*, ed. Richard A. Hunt and Richard H. Shultz, Jr. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp. 191-227.

55. These tensions are well described in Tom Donnelly, "Special Operations Still a Military Stepchild, *Army Times*, 1 July 1985, pp. 41-43.

56. As this article was being completed several steps in this direction were taken. The most significant were: a high-level conference on low-intensity conflict conducted 14-15 January 1986 at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.; a joint study of low-intensity conflict undertaken by the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command; announcement of Army and Navy plans to build up their special operations capabilities over the next five years; and announcement of a joint Air Force and Army examination of their ability to deal with low-intensity conflict. See Daniel Greene, "Conferees Face Challenges of Low-Level Wars," *Army Times*, 27 January 1986, pp. 2, 26; Larry Carney, "Army Plans 5-Year Expansion of Special Operations Forces," *Army Times*, 30 December 1985, p. 4; "Navy's SEAL Force to Grow to 2,700 by 1990," *Army Times*, 2 December 1985, p. 50; and Leonard Famiglietti, "Army-Air Force Team to Study Low-Intensity Conflict," *Army Times*, 9 December 1985, pp. 59, 60.

57. John M. Gates, "Vietnam: The Debate Goes On," *Parameters*, 14 (Spring 1984), 24-25.

58. "Excerpts from Schlesinger's Senate Testimony," *The New York Times*, 7 February 1985, p. A14.

59. George Herring advanced a similar conclusion in "Vietnam, El Salvador, and Uses of History," p. 108.

60. David H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 157.

61. Herring, "Vietnam, El Salvador, and Uses of History," p. 110.