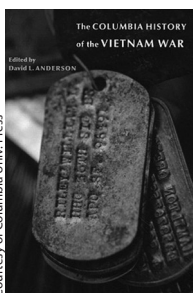


the war in Afghanistan. The book sees success as possible, as an imperative in fact, since the consequences of an unsuccessful disengagement would serve to embolden al Qaeda, allow Taliban organizations to continue to undermine Afghanistan and Pakistan, increase the threat of attacks against the United States, and increase instability in the region. Quitting the fight would likely encourage the terrorist agenda toward more heinous acts of armed propaganda. The good news is the current strategy, resources, and leadership in Afghanistan is the soundest since the war began in 2001. The combined operations of Coalition and Afghan forces have reversed the Taliban's momentum and achieved operational momentum, driving the Taliban out of key areas and safe havens in places like Helmand and Kandahar. The bad news is the stark reality that the United States and the international community have not developed a viable approach that can compel Pakistan to change its strategic calculus. The latter drives Islamabad to continue its support for insurgent and terrorist proxies operating safely from sanctuaries inside Pakistan. It is exceedingly difficult to win in counterinsurgency when the insurgents benefit from relatively unimpeded sanctuary. The crux is that Pakistan poses as a partner in the war while at the same time it duplicitously provides succor and support to the likes of the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network.



New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010

488 pages

\$65.00

## ***The Columbia History of the Vietnam War***

edited by David L. Anderson

**Reviewed by James H. Willbanks**, Director of the Department of Military History, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS

In the preface of this book, David L. Anderson states that his aim is “to provide a reliable historical perspective on the Vietnam War to advance accurate scholarship and sound policymaking,” while demonstrating that the war has striking relevance to contemporary issues and challenges. In pursuit of this goal, the editor provides a collection of essays on the Vietnam War by fourteen of

the most recognized and acclaimed scholars of the war; the essays focus on the political, historical, military, and social issues that defined this controversial conflict and its continuing impact on the United States and Vietnam.

Anderson, professor of history at California State University, Monterey Bay, and former president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations is eminently qualified to preside over this retrospective; his ten earlier books include *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam*, *The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War*, and *Facing My Lai: Moving Beyond the Massacre*.

Anderson opens the book with a short and concise overview of the Vietnam War that addresses the war's major moments and explores some of its major themes. He begins with a discussion of early Vietnamese history, French

colonialism, the First Indochina War, and a focus on the American war in Vietnam. The author presents the historical antecedents of American involvement in Southeast Asia and continues through the fall of Saigon in April 1975. Anderson closes the introductory essay with a discussion of “The War That Will Not Go Away,” addressing a number of topics, such as American Vietnam veterans, the war in film and literature, and American foreign policy in the aftermath of the war. This brief introduction sets the stage for the essays that follow.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section takes a chronological approach to discussing the war. Mark Philip Bradley provides a reexamination of Vietnamese revolutionary nationalism and the Vietminh-led war against the French. Richard H. Immerman looks at nation-building efforts and relations with the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in South Vietnam during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. Gary R. Hess examines America’s military commitment under Kennedy and Johnson, enumerating eight steps made during these administrations that deepened the American commitment. Lloyd C. Gardner discusses the motivations behind Johnson’s escalation of force. Robert J. McMahan addresses the pivotal period before and after the Tet Offensive. In the last essay in this section, Jeffrey P. Kimball discusses Nixon’s paradoxical decision to end US intervention while pursuing a destructive air war and sending forces into Cambodia and Laos (in that instance providing rotary and fixed-wing aviation to South Vietnamese forces).

The second section takes a more topical approach, beginning with two essays on America’s military strategy. John Prados concludes that the worst impact of the US strategy in the Vietnam War was that it substituted statistical measures for visible goals. Eric Bergerud focuses on the war in the villages, maintaining that the Americans did not lose the war as much as Hanoi and the National Liberation Front won it.

Helen E. Anderson examines the war’s impact on Vietnamese women followed by Robert K. Brigham’s consideration of the war’s impact on Vietnamese society as a whole. Melvin Small addresses American domestic politics and the tensions created by America’s involvement in Vietnam, demonstrating how “Few wars in [US] history have been so affected by domestic politics . . . .” Kenton Clymer rounds out this section with a discussion of the impact of the Vietnam War on Laos and Cambodia.

The final section of the book provides two excellent post-war perspectives addressing the contemporary relevance of the Vietnam War experience. Robert D. Schulzinger analyzes the legacy of the war on both Vietnam and the United States, as well as relations between the two nations. In the final essay, George C. Herring diagnoses the symptoms of the “Vietnam syndrome” and demonstrates how, despite repeated efforts to dispose of it, the syndrome “remains a prominent part of the American political landscape,” continuing to have a major impact on US foreign relations.

This is a timely book with contemporary relevance, published at a time when America’s experience in Vietnam continues to figure prominently in discussions about strategy and defense with regard to Afghanistan and Iraq. The

essays are well written and the quality and authority of the authors make it an invaluable addition to the continuing discourse on the war. Additionally, each essay is accompanied by a very useful list of suggested readings. For those reasons, this book is highly recommended for general readers who want to better understand the intense and significant debate over a complex and controversial war that ended over thirty years ago.