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"Cold Blood": LBJ's Conduct of Limited War in Vietnam

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Of the two great questions on American involvement in Vietnam- why did we intervene and why did we fail- the latter has provoked the most emotional controversy. Failure in Vietnam challenged as perhaps nothing else has one of our most fundamental myths- the notion that we can accomplish anything we set our collective minds to- and partisans of many diverse points of view have sought in its aftermath to explain this profoundly traumatic experience.

Much of this discussion ignores basic precepts of historical method. Many of those seeking to explain why we failed are in fact arguing that an alternative approach would have succeeded.<sup>1</sup> Such arguments are at best debatable on their own terms. More important, they are dubious methodologically. As Wayne Cole pointed out many years ago of a strikingly similar debate in the aftermath of World War II, the "most heated controversies . . . do not center on those matters for which the facts and truth can be determined with greatest certainty. The interpretive controversies, on the contrary, rage over questions about which the historian is least able to determine the truth."<sup>2</sup>

Much more might be learned by focusing on how the war was fought and explaining why it was fought as it was, without reference to alternative strategies, without presuming that it could have been won or was inevitably lost. Drawing on research I have done for a book on the Johnson administration's conduct of the Vietnam War, I will look at two crucial areas: the formulation of and subsequent non-debate over military strategy, and the administration's efforts to manage public opinion. By doing this, I think much can be learned about why the war was fought the way it was and took the direction it did.

## I

Limited war requires the most sophisticated strategy, precisely formulated in terms of ends and means, with particular attention to keeping costs at acceptable levels. What stands out about the Johnson administration's handling of Vietnam is that in what may have been the most complex war ever fought by the United States there was never any systematic discussion at the highest levels of government of the fundamental issue of how the war should be fought. The crucial discussions of June and July 1965 focused on the numbers of troops that would be provided rather than how and for what ends they would be used, and this was the only such discussion until the Communist Tet Offensive forced the issue in March 1968. Strategy, such as it was, emerged from the field, with little or no input from the people at the top.

Why was this the case? Simple overconfidence may be the most obvious explanation. From the commander in chief to the G.I.s in the field, Americans could not conceive that they would be unable to impose their will on what Lyndon Johnson once dismissed as that "raggedy-ass little fourth-rate country." There was no need to think in terms of strategy.

But the explanation goes much deeper than that. Although he took quite seriously his role as commander in chief, personally picking bombing targets, agonizing over the fate of U.S. airmen, and building a scale model of Khe Sanh in the White House situation room, Lyndon Johnson, unlike Polk, Lincoln, or Franklin Roosevelt, never took control of his war. In many ways a great president, Johnson was badly miscast as a war leader. He preoccupied himself with other matters, the Great Society and the legislative process he understood best and so loved. In contrast to Lincoln, Roosevelt, and even Harry Truman, he had little interest in military affairs and no illusions of military expertise. He was fond of quoting his political mentor Sam Rayburn to the effect that "if we start making the military decisions, I wonder why we paid to send them to West Point," probably a rationalization for his own ignorance and insecurity in the military realm.<sup>3</sup> Johnson "failed to do the one thing that the central leadership must do," Stephen Peter Rosen has observed. He did not "define a clear military mission for the military" and did not "establish a clear limit to the resources to be allocated for that mission."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, at crucial points in the war, the commander in chief gave little hint of his thinking. National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy literally pleaded with him in November 1965 to make clear his positions on the big issues so that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara could be certain he was running the war "the right way for the right reasons, in your view."<sup>5</sup> By late 1967, private citizen Bundy's pleading had taken on a tone of urgency, warning Johnson that he must "take command of a contest that is more political in character than any in our history except the Civil War..."<sup>6</sup>

McNamara himself might have filled the strategic void left by the president, but he was no more willing to intrude in this area than Johnson. In many ways a superb Secretary of Defense, he was an ineffectual minister of war. Conceding his ignorance of military matters, he refused to interfere with the formulation of strategy, leaving it to the military to set the strategic agenda. When asked on one occasion why he did not tell his officers what to do and was reminded that Churchill had not hesitated to do so, he shot back that he was no Churchill and would not dabble in an area where he had no competence.

Johnson and McNamara saw their principal task as maintaining tight operational control over the military. This tendency must be understood in the context of the larger strains in civil-military relations in the 1950s and 1960s. A powerful peacetime military establishment was something new in post-World War II American life, and civilian leaders were uncertain how to handle it. They recognized the necessity of military power in an era of global conflict, but they feared the possibility of rising military influence within the government. If it confirmed the tradition of civilian preeminence, Douglas MacArthur's defiance of civilian authority during the Korean War seemed also to symbolize the dangers. Former general and president Dwight D. Eisenhower waged open warfare with his Joint Chiefs, and civil-military tension emerged full-blown in the Kennedy years. McNamara's efforts to master the arcane mysteries of the Pentagon budget process set off a near revolt within the military, and civilian and military leaders were sharply divided over the handling of such things as the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Suspicious of the military and operating in an age of profound international tension with weaponry of enormous destructive potential, civilians concentrated on keeping the generals and admirals in check. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, McNamara

haunted the Navy's command center and even then had difficulty preventing provocative actions, reinforcing his determination to keep control tightly in his own hands.<sup>9</sup> Johnson brought to the White House the Southern populist's suspicion of the military. Suspecting that the admirals and generals needed war to boost their reputations, he, like McNamara was determined to keep a close rein on them.<sup>10</sup> The consequence in Vietnam was a day-to-day intrusion into the tactical conduct of the war on a quite unprecedented scale. The larger result, Rosen observes, was an unhappy combination of "high level indecision and micro-management."<sup>11</sup>

Inasmuch as McNamara and Johnson's civilian advisers thought strategically, they did so in terms of the limited war theories in vogue at the time. Strategy was primarily a matter of sending signals to foes, of communicating resolve, of using military force in a carefully calibrated way to deter enemies or bargain toward a negotiated settlement. This approach must have appeared expedient to Johnson and his advisers because it seemed to offer a cheap, low-risk answer to a difficult problem. It also appeared to be controllable, thereby reducing the risk of all-out war.<sup>12</sup> The Kennedy administration's successful handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis seems to have reinforced in the minds of U.S. officials the value of such an approach. "There is no longer any such thing as strategy, only crisis management," McNamara exclaimed in the aftermath of Kennedy's victory.<sup>13</sup>

He could not have been more wrong, of course, and the reliance on limited war theory had unfortunate consequences. It encouraged avoidance of costly and risky decisions. It diverted attention from real strategy and caused the military problem of how to win the war in South Vietnam to be neglected. It led the decision-makers into steps they must have sensed the American people might eventually reject. And when Hanoi refused to respond as bargaining theory said it should, the United States was left without any strategy at all.<sup>14</sup>

Created in World War II to provide military advice to the commander in chief, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not effectively play that role in the Vietnam War. The National Security Act of 1947 as modified by subsequent legislation left the JCS with no formal position in the chain of command. They were merely advisers, and there was no requirement that they be consulted. More important, perhaps, in the new postwar environment civilians had increasingly invaded a once exclusive preserve and senior military officers had abdicated a good deal of responsibility in the area of strategic thought and planning. Post-World War II military officers had also been "civilianized" through indoctrination in management techniques and limited war theory at the expense of their more traditional folkways. Thus the new breed of military managers, the Joint Chiefs handpicked by McNamara, were by and large staff officers, men in many ways ill-equipped to devise sophisticated strategies for a complex war. <sup>15</sup>

Civil-military tensions further complicated the formulation of strategy. From the start, there were profound differences among the Joint Chiefs of Staff and between them and the civilian leadership as to how, or at least at what level, the war should be fought. Perhaps tragically, these differences were never even addressed, much less resolved. Indeed, the decision-making process seems to have been rigged to produce consensus rather than controversy. As a result, some major issues were raised but not answered; others were not even raised. The sort of full-scale debate that might have led to a reconsideration of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam or to a more precise formulation of strategy did not take place. And the tensions and divisions that were left unresolved

would provide the basis for bitter conflict when the steps taken in July 1965 did not produce the desired results.

During the process of escalation in Vietnam, civilian and military leaders approached each other cautiously. The Joint Chiefs compromised their own sharp differences over how the war should be fought and developed unified proposals to prevent the civilians from exploiting their differences.<sup>16</sup> Johnson feared the implications of the Joint Chiefs' proposals for escalation. Wary at the same time of provoking a military revolt and sensitive to the military's influence with conservatives in Congress, he was determined, in Jack Valenti's words, to "sign on" his military advisers to his Vietnam policies, thus protecting his right flank. The president repeatedly trimmed the Joint Chiefs' proposals to expand the bombing of North Vietnam and commit combat troops to South Vietnam, but he refused to impose firm limits and at each step he gave them enough to suggest they might get more later.<sup>17</sup>

During the July 1965 decisions on the major troop commitment, deep divisions over strategy were subordinated to maintaining the appearance of unity. While rejecting without any discussion several of the measures the JCS considered essential for prosecuting the war, most notably mobilization of the reserves, Johnson shrewdly co-opted them into his consensus. The chiefs did not deliberately mislead the president as to what might be required in Vietnam. On the crucial question of North Vietnamese resistance, they probably miscalculated as badly as he did. Perhaps to prevent him from moving to the position advocated by George Ball, however, they downplayed the difficulties the United States might face, and although bitterly disappointed with his refusal to mobilize the reserves, they quietly acquiesced. They seem to have assumed that once the United States was committed in Vietnam they could maneuver the president into doing what they wanted through what JCS Chairman General Earle Wheeler called a "foot-in-the-door" approach.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the July 1965 discussions comprised an elaborate cat and mouse game with the nation the ultimate loser. Perhaps if the military had perceived Johnson's steadfast determination to limit U.S. escalation, they might have been less ready to press for war. Though they too miscalculated, the military seem to have perceived more accurately than the civilians what would be required in Vietnam. Perhaps, if Johnson had been more aware of their estimates and reservations, he might have been more cautious.

An equally crippling form of bureaucratic gridlock persisted during the period 1965-1967. Far more than has been recognized and than was revealed in the Pentagon Papers, no one in the Johnson administration really liked the way the war was being fought or the results that were being obtained. What is even more striking, however, is that despite the rampant dissatisfaction, there was no change in strategy or even any systematic discussion at the highest levels of government of the possibility of a change in strategy. Again, the system seems to have been rigged to prevent debate and adaptation.

From July 1965, there were sharp differences over strategy within the Johnson administration, and these differences became more pronounced as the measures taken failed to produce the desired results. The running battle over the bombing, especially between McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is well known.<sup>19</sup> But there was also widespread and steadily growing conflict over General William C. Westmoreland's costly and ineffectual ground strategy. From the outset, the Marine Corps strongly objected to the Army's determination to fight guerrillas by staging decisive battles "along the

Tannenberg design."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps more significant, within the Army itself there was great concern about Westmoreland's approach. As early as November 1965, after the bloody battle of the Ia Drang Valley, Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson had been skeptical of Westmoreland's attrition strategy, and increasingly thereafter he questioned the wastefulness and fruitfulness of search-and-destroy operations. Vice Chief of Staff Creighton Abrams seems to have shared at least some of Johnson's skepticism, as did some top officers in the field in Vietnam.<sup>21</sup>

Divisions within the military paled compared to the growing conflict between military and civilians. On their side, the military bristled at Johnson's refusal to mobilize the reserves and chafed under restrictions on the bombing, troop levels, and the use of troops in Laos, Cambodia, and across the DMZ. They protested bitterly Washington's micromanagement of the war. "The idea," Marine General Victor Krulak complained in 1967, "is to take more and more items of less and less significance to higher and higher levels so that more and more decisions on smaller and smaller matters may be made by fewer and fewer people."

The civilians, on the other hand, observed with growing alarm military proposals for escalation. When the Joint Chiefs proposed a huge increase in troops, mining of North Vietnam's major ports, and expansion of the war into Laos and Cambodia in March 1967, civilians in the State and Defense Departments mobilized as they had not before to head off what they viewed as a perilous expansion of the war. They disagreed themselves on what should be done about the bombing, but they generally agreed that henceforth the major effort should be south of the twentieth parallel and there was some sentiment that it might be stopped altogether. By this time, the ground strategy was also under fire. Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton warned of the "fatal flaw" of approving more and more troops "while only praying for their proper use." At the very minimum, he added, an upper limit should be imposed on American forces. But he urged McNamara to go further. The "philosophy of the war should be fought out now, so everyone will not be proceeding on their own major premises, and getting us in deeper and deeper."<sup>23</sup>

McNamara himself took the lead against expansion of the war in the spring of 1967. In a draft presidential memorandum of May 19, 1967, the secretary went further than the Pentagon and State Department civilians, advancing positions the authors of the Pentagon Papers accurately describe as "radical." Warning that the JCS proposals would not achieve victory, he sketched out a complex politico-military "strategy" that at least hinted at extrication. The bombing should be cut back to the area below the twentieth parallel. A firm ceiling should be placed on ground troops, after which the United States should more actively seek a political settlement. He proposed a scaling down of objectives, affirming that the United States should not be obligated to guarantee an independent, non-communist South Vietnam. He spoke of compromise, even involving "inter alia, a role in the south for members of the VC," and without naming names proposed "major personnel changes within the government."<sup>24</sup>

Despite this widespread dissatisfaction, there was no change in strategy or even serious discussion of a change in strategy. There are several major reasons for the persistence of this bureaucratic and strategic gridlock. Certainly, the military tradition of autonomy of the field commander inhibited debate on and possible alteration of the ground strategy. Although greatly concerned with the cost and consequences of Westmoreland's excessive use of firepower, Army Chief of Staff Johnson deferred to the

field commander. "I would deplore and oppose any intervention from the Washington level to impose limitations on further firepower application," he reassured Westmoreland. He would go no further than suggest that it might be "prudent" to "undertake a very careful examination of the problem."<sup>25</sup>

More important was the leadership style of the commander in chief. Lyndon Johnson's entirely political manner of running the war, his consensus-oriented *modus operandi*, effectively stifled debate. On such issues as bombing targets and bombing pauses, troops levels and troop use, by making concessions to each side without giving any what it wanted, he managed to keep dissent and controversy under control.<sup>26</sup>

The president and his top advisers also imposed rigid standards of loyalty on a bitterly divided administration. Unlike Franklin Roosevelt, Johnson had no tolerance for controversy, and he imposed on his advisers the "Macy's window at high noon" brand of loyalty made legendary by David Halberstam.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the two men who might have influenced him, McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, shared his perverted notions of team play. "I don't believe the government of a complicated state can operate effectively," McNamara once said, "if those in charge of the departments of the government express disagreement with decisions of the established head of that government." Whenever someone dissented, it made more difficult the attainment of the larger group goals.<sup>28</sup> In-house devil's advocate George Ball later recalled that McNamara treated his dissenting memos rather like "poisonous snakes." He was "absolutely horrified" by them, considered them "next to treason." It is now obvious that when McNamara himself became a dissenter in 1967 it was an excruciating experience for him.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, and perhaps even more important, is what might be called the MacArthur syndrome, the pervasive fear among civilians and military of a repetition of the illustrious general's challenge to civilian authority. Johnson, as noted, lived in terror of a military revolt and did everything in his power to avert it. "General, I have a lot riding on you," he blurted out to Westmoreland in Honolulu in February 1966. "I hope you don't pull a MacArthur on me." At Honolulu, Westmoreland later recalled, Johnson carefully sized him up, eventually satisfying himself that his general was "sufficiently understanding" of the constraints imposed on him and was a "reliable" and "straightforward soldier who would not get involved in the politics of war."<sup>30</sup>

An encounter in July 1967 is even more revealing of the delicate game being played between the general and his commander in chief. An increasingly frustrated and restive Westmoreland reminded the president that he had made every effort to "ease his burden by my conduct and demands." But he added an only slightly veiled warning that he must think of his own requirements first. Johnson flattered Westmoreland by expressing great admiration for the way he had handled himself. He cleverly sought to appease the general by hinting that he did not always favor his civilian advisers over his military.<sup>31</sup>

Themselves learning from Korea, the Joint Chiefs carefully refrained from anything even smacking of a direct challenge to civilian authority. Although they remained deeply divided on the conduct of the war, they continued to present unified proposals to the civilians, thus stifling debate within their own ranks. A sophisticated politician skilled in bureaucratic maneuver, General Wheeler's approach was political rather than confrontational and emphasized short-term acquiescence and silence. Hopeful

eventually of getting strategic license by gradually breaking down the restrictions imposed by the White House, he encouraged Westmoreland to continue to push for escalation of the war and to accept less than he wanted in order to get his "foot in the door." Wheeler also implored the field commander to keep his subordinates quiet. If escalation were to occur following reports of military dissatisfaction, he warned, critics would conclude that the military was "riding roughshod" over civilians. Officers must understand the "absolute necessity for every military man to keep his mouth shut and get on with the war."<sup>32</sup> Thus rather than confront their differences directly, the president and his top military leadership dealt with each other by stealth and indirection.

In various ways, between July 1965 and August 1967, debate was stifled and dissent squelched. When Army Chief of Staff Johnson warned in a speech that the war might last ten years, Barry Zorthian later recalled, "he got his ass chewed out. That was denied awfully fast."<sup>33</sup> On the "orders" of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, also a critic of Westmoreland, Marine Commandant General Wallace Greene in a "deep backgrounder" in Saigon in August 1966 affirmed that it would take 750,000 men and five years to win the war with the prevailing strategy. The reaction, Greene later recalled, was "immediate, explosive, and remarkable." An "agitated" and "as usual, profane" president demanded to know "What in the God-damned hell" Greene meant by making such a statement. The commandant was forced to issue denials, and the White House denied the existence of studies leading to such conclusions.<sup>34</sup>

Deeply alarmed with the ground strategy by mid-1966, Marine General Victor Krulak sought to change it. Certain that the strategy of attrition played to enemy strengths, he proposed an alternative that would have combined protection of the South Vietnamese population with the slow liberation of Vietcong-controlled villages. Krulak was well-connected in Washington, and with the blessings of Greene and Commander in Chief Pacific, Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, he took his proposals to McNamara, Averell Harriman, and the president himself. As Krulak later recalled it, McNamara made only "brief comment." Harriman expressed interest in his proposals for pacification. But he got nowhere with Johnson. When he mentioned that attacks on North Vietnamese ports might be combined with an altered ground strategy, the president "got to his feet, put his arm around my shoulder, and propelled me firmly toward the door."<sup>35</sup>

Even in the spring of 1967, with the Secretary of Defense now in open revolt against what had once been called "McNamara's war" and civilians and military deeply divided against each other, there was no change of strategy and indeed no discussion of change at the top levels. Johnson continued to fear that adoption of the military's program might provoke a larger war. On the other hand, like his National Security Adviser, Walt Rostow, he felt that McNamara's dovish proposals went "a bit too far" to the other extreme. Alarmed by what Rostow called "the dangerously strong feelings in your official family," he sought, like his national security adviser, a "scenario" that could "hold our official family together in ways that look after the nation's interest and make military sense."<sup>36</sup> Characteristically, he avoided a confrontation between the positions of the JCS and McNamara. There was no discussion of the issues at the top levels. He delayed a decision for months, and when he decided he did so on a piecemeal basis, carefully avoiding debate on the larger issues. Thus, according to the authors of the Pentagon Papers, the debate (if indeed that word can properly be used) "floundered toward a compromise...." <sup>37</sup> The president approved an expansion of the bombing, but stopped

well short of mining North Vietnamese ports. He refused to approve expansion of the war into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. He agreed to deploy only 55,000 additional ground forces, but he refused to set a ceiling and he scrupulously avoided discussion of the larger issue of how and for what purposes the troops would be used.

The debate that could not occur within the Administration furiously took place in Congress in August 1967 in hearings before Senator John Stennis's Preparedness Subcommittee. Frustrated from above and under growing pressure from increasingly restive officers below, the JCS in August 1967 mounted the closest thing to a MacArthur-like challenge to civilian authority, abandoning Wheeler's cautious approach and taking their case to Congress.<sup>38</sup> The original intent of the hearings was to "get McNamara" and force Johnson to escalate the war.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, McNamara came to see hearings designed to "get" him as an opportunity to combat growing military pressures for expanding the war without violating his own rigid standards of loyalty to the president. In a strange, almost surreal way, the Stennis Subcommittee hearings became the forum for the debate that could not take place within the inner councils of the government.

According to one account, the Stennis hearings caused a near-revolt on the part of the Joint Chiefs. As journalist Mark Perry tells it, McNamara's attack on the bombing in his testimony before the committee on August 25 provoked a special emergency meeting of the Joint Chiefs at which a decision was reached to resign en masse. That decision was allegedly reversed the following morning after General Wheeler had second thoughts. "It's mutiny," Perry quotes him telling his colleagues. "In any event," he is said to have added, "If we resign they'll just get someone else. And we'll be forgotten." Perry's story has sparked considerable controversy, and has been emphatically denied by the two living members of Johnson's Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>40</sup>

Whatever the case, the Stennis hearings represented what Johnson had most feared since the start of the war, division within his administration and the threat of a military revolt backed by right-wingers in Congress. Remarkably, he was able to contain it. He "resolved" the strategic differences between his subordinates as he had resolved them before—without addressing the fundamental issues. He kicked the now obviously dissident McNamara downstairs to the World Bank and tossed the JCS a bone by authorizing a handful of new bombing targets. But he refused to confront head on the larger issues of either the air or ground wars.

Publicly, the president dealt with the problem of divisions within his official family by vehemently denying their existence. There were "no quarrels, no antagonisms within the administration," he said. "I have never known a period when I thought there was more harmony, more general agreement, and a more cooperative attitude."<sup>41</sup> Administration officials followed to the letter the script written by their president. Years later, McNamara admitted that he "went through hell" on the Stennis hearings.<sup>42</sup> Yet at a White House meeting, he praised his adversary General Wheeler for a "helluva good job" before the Stennis Subcommittee and observed that the small differences between himself and the JCS were "largely worked out."<sup>43</sup> Wheeler publicly dismissed rumors that the JCS had contemplated resignation with a terse: "Bull Shit!"<sup>44</sup>

To the end, Johnson continued to deny that significant differences had existed within his administration, and no one could have written a better epitaph for a hopelessly flawed command system than its architect, the man who had imposed his own peculiar brand of unity on a bitterly divided government. "There have been no divisions in this

government," he proudly proclaimed in November 1967. "We may have been wrong, but we have not been divided."<sup>45</sup> It was a strange observation, reflecting a curiously distorted sense of priorities. And of course it was not true. The administration was both wrong and divided, and the fact that the divisions could not be worked out or even addressed may have contributed to the wrongness of the policies, at huge costs to the men themselves- and especially to the nation.

## II

By the time the divisions over strategy became acute in late 1967, Johnson's attention was drawn inexorably to the impending collapse of his support at home. Vietnam makes abundantly clear that a- perhaps the- central problem of waging limited war is to *maintain* public support without *arousing* public emotion. One of the most interesting and least studied areas of the war is the Johnson administration's unsuccessful effort to do precisely this. Vietnam was not fundamentally a public relations problem, and a more vigorous and effective public relations campaign would not have changed the outcome. Still, what stands out quite starkly from an examination of this topic is the small, indeed insignificant, role played by public opinion in the decisions for war in July 1965 and the strangely limited and notably cautious efforts made by the Johnson administration between 1965 and 1967 to promote public support for the war.

In examining the extensive White House files for June and July 1965, the researcher is immediately struck by the almost negligible attention given to domestic opinion in the discussions leading to Johnson's decisions for war. At a meeting on July 21, George Ball, the major opponent of escalation, resorted to the obvious analogy, using charts from the Korean War to warn the president that public support could not be taken for granted. Admonishing that the war would be protracted, Ball reminded the group that as casualties had increased between 1950 and 1952, public support had dropped from 56 percent to 30 percent. A long war, he also predicted, would generate powerful, perhaps irresistible pressures to strike directly at North Vietnam, risking dangerous escalation.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, no one responded to Ball's warning, but on those few other occasions when the issue came up the tone was much more optimistic. At another point in the same meeting, McGeorge Bundy observed that the nation "seemed in the mood to accept grim news." In another meeting, Marine Corps Commandant Greene predicted that the nation would support the commitment of as many as 500,000 men for as long as five years.<sup>47</sup>

The issue also received a brief and revealing hearing at a meeting on July 27. Playing the role of devil's advocate, Johnson asked his advisers if Congress and the public would go along with 600,000 troops and billions of dollars being sent 10,000 miles away. Only Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor responded, laconically observing that the Gallup Poll showed that Americans were "basically behind our commitment." But, Johnson persisted, "if you make a commitment to jump off a building and you find out how high it is, you may want to withdraw that commitment," a remarkably prescient observation. No one responded, however, and nothing more was said. His mind apparently made up, the president dropped a crucial question and went on to something else.<sup>48</sup>

Why this absence of discussion of an issue that turned out to be so important? The answer, in one word, seems to have been complacency. Since World War II, the executive branch had successfully managed public opinion on most major foreign policy issues. It had kept a potentially troublesome press in line by appealing to its patriotic instincts, by making it a partner in the national security state, by flattery and favors, and when these failed, by pressures and reprisals. Government bureaucrats had become increasingly adept at analyzing and manipulating public opinion. Perceiving the growing importance of foreign policy elites, they used various means to sway them, giving interest groups special briefings, appointing them to consultative bodies, or even to high office. To conduct private campaigns for its policies, the government mobilized agencies such as the CIA-funded citizens groups, and, on especially urgent issues, ostensibly private groups such as the Committee for the Marshall Plan. Postwar administrations were never free from criticism, but in no case was a major foreign policy initiative frustrated by lack of public support.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps because of this record of success, those political scientists who developed the theories of limited war so much in vogue in the 1950s and 1960s all but ignored the problem of public opinion. After considerable discussion, Robert E. Osgood conceded that because of their traditional approach to issues of war and peace, Americans might have difficulty accepting limited war. Without indicating how the problem could be resolved, he went on to assert that limited wars must be fought because they provided the only viable military alternative in the nuclear age. <sup>50</sup>

The complacency of top administration officials was reinforced in the summer of 1965 by what seemed clear signs of public support for U.S. policy in Vietnam. Polls even suggested a hawkish mood, a solid plurality of 47 percent favoring sending more troops to Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> Drawing a sharp distinction between the political liabilities that had bedeviled France in the First Indochina War and the political advantages of the United States in 1965, McGeorge Bundy assured Johnson that the American public, although unenthusiastic, was reconciled to the U.S. role in Vietnam. "While there is widespread questioning and uneasiness about the way in which we may be playing that role, the public as a whole seems to realize that the role must be played," Bundy concluded.<sup>52</sup>

What about the "lesson" of Korea raised by Ball on July 21, that public support would erode if the war dragged on and casualties increased? The administration seems to have dismissed the Korean analogy, perhaps because it felt it could get what it wanted in Vietnam without the travail and agony of Korea. Johnson and his advisers acted in the expectation that "reason and mutual concessions" would prevail, Bill Moyers later conceded, that Hanoi could be enticed or intimidated into negotiating and a drawn-out war avoided. <sup>53</sup> Thus a fatal miscalculation about North Vietnam's response to U.S. escalation may have been behind an equally fatal miscalculation about U.S. public opinion.

The administration also misread the significance of the budding peace movement. Rusk compared the campus protest of the spring and early summer of 1965 to the 1938 Oxford Union debate, observing that most of those who "took the pledge" in the 1930s subsequently entered military service without protest.<sup>54</sup> McGeorge Bundy later admitted that "We simply hadn't estimated the kinds of new forces that were loose in the land in the middle 1960s. I don't think anybody foresaw in 1964 and 1965 the overall cresting of feeling which had begun in 1964 at Berkeley...."<sup>55</sup>

Equally striking- although perhaps less surprising- is how little the administration did in the first years of the war to mobilize public support. Originally anticipating that the president would at least call up the reserves and declare a national emergency, administration officials in June 1965 had proposed a "full scenario" of actions to prepare the nation for war. A presidential message was to be drafted and plans laid for consultation with Congress. McNamara proposed creating a blue ribbon task force to explain the war and generate public support. Presidential aides even suggested the formation of a citizens' committee like the Committee for the Marshall Plan to build elite support. White House adviser Horace Busby urged Johnson to go out and rally the public in the mode of a Franklin Roosevelt or Winston Churchill.<sup>56</sup>

The president rejected all these proposals. He undoubtedly feared that a public debate on Vietnam at this crucial time might jeopardize major pieces of Great Society legislation then pending in Congress. And he really did not want to risk what he later called "the woman I really loved" [the Great Society] for "that bitch of a war on the other side of the world."<sup>57</sup>

But there were larger and more important reasons intimately connected to prevailing theories of the way limited wars should be fought. Johnson also feared that mobilizing the nation for war would set loose irresistible pressures for escalation and victory that might provoke the larger war with the Soviet Union and China, perhaps even the nuclear confrontation that the commitment in Vietnam had been designed to deter in the first place. The administration thus concluded, as Rusk later put it, "that in a nuclear world it is just too dangerous for an entire people to get too angry and we deliberately . . . tried to do in cold blood what perhaps can only be done in hot blood..." "I don't want to be drastic and cause tension," the president told the National Security Council on July 27.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed for McNamara, the U.S. official who gave practical application to limited war theory, Vietnam was the very prototype of the way wars must be fought in the nuclear age. "The greatest contribution Vietnam is making," the Secretary of Defense observed early in the war, "is developing an ability in the United States to fight a limited war . . . without arousing the public ire," almost a necessity, he added, "since this is the kind of war we'll likely be facing for the next fifty years."<sup>59</sup>

For a variety of reasons then, Johnson gambled that without taking exceptional measures he could hold public support long enough to achieve his goals in Vietnam. "I think we can get our people to support us without having to be provocative," he told his advisers.<sup>60</sup>

The United States therefore went to war in July 1965 in a manner uniquely quiet and underplay in "cold blood." The president ordered his July 28 decisions implemented in a "low key" way. He announced the major troop increase at a noon press conference instead of at prime time. It was even lumped in with a number of other items in a way that obscured its significance.<sup>61</sup>

With the exception of several hastily arranged, typically Johnsonian public relations blitzes, the administration persisted in this low-key approach until the late summer of 1967. It created no special machinery to monitor and manipulate public opinion. It took only a few modest steps to promote public support, leaving much of the work to nominally private groups. More often than not, its public relations efforts were reactive and defensive and as the war wore on increasingly vindictive.

The administration's understanding of its public relations problems at the outset of the war combined naivete and myopia with a good measure of perceptiveness. The problem with the Saigon government, some officials reasoned, was its "mushy" public relations program rather than its chronic instability and palpable incompetence.<sup>63</sup> Popular uneasiness with the war was attributed to misunderstanding. The American people and elites, even editors and publishers, did not comprehend how this limited war differed from earlier wars, officials lamented. "We are still looking for the 'front,' still talking largely in terms of battles, number of casualties, tonnage of bombs."<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, some of Johnson's advisers clearly perceived that public support, although broad, was fragile. There seemed little understanding of the larger policies upon which intervention in Vietnam was based. The public was "extremely vulnerable to rumor, gossip, and quick reverses," and each new initiative fed exaggerated expectations for a settlement that when not quickly realized led to disillusionment. The administration seemed always on the defensive. "We only plug holes and run as fast as we can to stay even," Assistant Secretary of State James Greenfield conceded. Some lower level officials also shrewdly perceived that the key to ultimate success was not the skill of their public relations activities but signs of progress in Vietnam. "What we need more than anything else is some visible evidence of success for our efforts to defeat the Viet Cong, deter Hanoi, and...bring peace to the Vietnamese countryside."<sup>64</sup>

Assuming that education rather than exhortation was the key to public support, administration officials mounted a quiet, behind-the-scenes campaign. No Office of War Information was created and no dramatic programs were undertaken to rally the public to the cause. A New York public relations firm was hired to improve the image of the Saigon government. The booklet "Why Vietnam?" was sent to every member of Congress and to every major newspaper, and a film by the same name, originally designed for military recruits, was sent out to nearly 500 high schools and colleges and shown on a number of commercial television stations. Administration officials conducted briefings for state governors and put together packets of materials that could be used to defend the war. They closely monitored press and Congressional debates, watching for and answering criticisms. The administration dealt with the budding peace movement by ignoring it, going out of its way to avoid "any impression of an overly worried reaction" to major demonstrations in November 1965.<sup>65</sup>

To a considerable degree, the government privatized its selling of the war. With administration advice and assistance, the Young Democrats mounted drives on college campuses in support of U.S. policy. The Junior Chamber of Commerce arranged half-time ceremonies at local and nationally televised football games to include salutes to the men fighting in Vietnam. The administration persuaded the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV), the so-called "Vietnam lobby," to launch a multi-faceted program to boost support for the war and helped it secure the funds to do so. Indeed, in the first six months of the war the AFV spearheaded the administration's public relations campaign.<sup>66</sup>

While privatizing the propaganda campaign, the president and his advisers contented themselves with responding to critics in a way that was peculiarly Johnsonian. To deflect attention from Senator J. William Fulbright's early 1966 televised hearings on Vietnam, Johnson, amidst great fanfare, hustled off to Honolulu for a 'summit' meeting with South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky. A compulsive reader, viewer, and listener, the president himself seemed at first intent on and then increasingly obsessed

with answering every accusation and responding to every charge. When General Matthew Ridgway came out against the war, the commander in chief ordered Army Chief of Staff Johnson to get statements of support from *two* World War II heroes, Generals Omar Bradley and J. Lawton Collins.<sup>67</sup> Much valuable time was consumed preparing a detailed "dossier" on hostile columnist Walter Lippmann to demonstrate that he had opposed earlier Cold War "successes" such as the Truman Doctrine and the Berlin Airlift. Harried White House staffers spent hours answering line for line criticisms from journalists and congressmen.

Despite growing concern with the steady erosion of public support, the administration deviated only slightly from its low-key approach in 1966 and early 1967. Before the congressional elections of 1966, Johnson himself mounted a speaking tour of the Midwest, emphasizing, among other things, that American boys in the field were not being given the support they deserved. To get around the increasingly critical major metropolitan newspapers, he sought to get his message out to middle-America by granting special favors to the editors of local newspapers. Just before the elections, he donned the cap of commander in chief, flying off to preside over a conference at Manila of the seven nations fighting in Vietnam, then visiting each ally separately and using the publicity thereby generated to rally support for his policies.<sup>69</sup>

Such efforts were no more than temporarily and modestly successful, however, and by mid-1967, the administration belatedly realized that its most urgent crisis was at home. The president's job approval rating declined steadily through 1966 and into 1967. More ominous, the number of those who thought sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake increased sharply, raising disturbing parallels to Korea.<sup>70</sup> Still more unnerving was the mood of the nation, anxious, frustrated, increasingly divided. This "pinpoint on the globe [Vietnam], " old New Dealer and Johnson adviser David Lilienthal lamented, was "like an infection, a 'culture' of some horrible disease, a cancer where the wildly growing cells multiply and multiply until the whole body is poisoned."<sup>71</sup>

Signs of waning support left the administration deeply troubled. Johnson complained about his inability to get across his message: "It is hell when a president has to spend half of his time keeping his own people juiced up."<sup>72</sup> He and his advisers particularly worried about public perceptions, fed by the press, that the war had become a stalemate.<sup>73</sup> The president groped for some magic formula to reverse the spread of disillusionment, on one occasion longing for "some colorful general like McArthur [sic] with his shirt neck open" who could dismiss as "pure Communist propaganda" the talk of a stalemate and go to Saigon and do battle with the press.<sup>74</sup> "A miasma of trouble hangs over everything," Lady Bird Johnson confided to her diary' "The temperament of our people seems to be, 'you must get excited, get passionate, fight it and get it over with, or we must pull out.' It is unbearably hard to fight a limited war."<sup>75</sup>

### III

Writing to Johnson in late 1967, Undersecretary of State Nicholas deB. Katzenbach raised the perplexing question: "Can the tortoise of progress in Vietnam stay ahead of the hare of dissent at home?"<sup>76</sup> Katzenbach's Aesopian analogy suggests the extent to which by late 1967 the two strands of our story had come together. And it made clear the dilemma faced by Lyndon Johnson. To stave off collapse of the home front,

progress must be demonstrated in Vietnam; yet such progress might not be possible without clear signs of firm public support at home.

By late 1967, Katzenbach and numerous other civilian advisers were pressing Johnson to resolve the dilemma by doing what he had thus far adamantly refused to do: address directly the issue of how the war was being fought. A now blatantly dissident McNamara on November 1 warned that stubborn persistence in the present course would not end the war and might bring about dangerous new pressures for drastic escalation or withdrawal. Going beyond his proposals of May 19, he pressed for an indefinite bombing halt. He further advocated stabilizing the ground war by publicly fixing a ceiling on force levels and by instituting a searching review of ground operations with the object of reducing U.S. casualties and turning over more responsibility to the South Vietnamese.<sup>77</sup>

From inside and outside the government, numerous civilians joined McNamara in urging Johnson to check dissent at home by changing the ground strategy. Katzenbach, Bundy, McNamara's top civilian advisers in the Pentagon, a group of establishment figures meeting under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment, and the president's own "Wise Men" agreed that Westmoreland's search and destroy strategy must be abandoned. Warning, as the Wise Men put it, that "endless, inconclusive fighting" was the "most serious single cause of domestic disquiet," they proposed instead a "clear-and-hold" strategy that would be less expensive in blood and treasure. Such a strategy, they reasoned, might stabilize the war at "a politically tolerable level" and save South Vietnam "without surrender and without risking a wider war." They also suggested an incipient form of what would later be called "Vietnamization," urging that a greater military burden should be gradually shifted to the South Vietnamese.<sup>78</sup>

Speechwriter Harry McPherson and presidential adviser McGeorge Bundy went still further, getting closer to the heart of the flaws of Johnson's exercise of presidential powers in wartime. McPherson gently chided his boss for expanding the bombing to head off military criticism. "You are the Commander in Chief," he affirmed. "If you think a policy is wrong, you should not follow it just to quiet the generals and admirals."<sup>79</sup> Bundy pressed Johnson to take control of the war. He should arrange a "solid internal understanding" between Rusk, McNamara, and the Joint Chiefs on the bombing, a "basic command decision" to settle the issue once and for all. He should also initiate a careful review of the ground strategy at the "highest military and civilian levels." Conceding that it was a "highly sensitive matter" to question the field commander, Bundy went on to say that if the strategy was not wise, "the plans of the field commander must be questioned." Now that the principal battleground was domestic opinion, the "Commander in Chief has both the right and duty . . . to visibly take command of a contest that is more political in character than any in our history except the Civil War (where Lincoln interfered much more than you have)." It was essential, the former national security adviser warned, to end the confusion and conflict in government and steady the home front.<sup>80</sup>

Johnson was not moved by the urgent appeals of his advisers. He continued to fear the risks of an expanded war, and he was unsympathetic to repeated JCS appeals for expansion of both air and ground operations. But he also doubted that McNamara's proposals would bring results. "How do we get this conclusion?" he scrawled on a memo where the secretary had predicted that a bombing halt would lead to peace talks. "Why believe this?" he noted, where McNamara predicted a "strong possibility" that North Vietnam would stop military activities across the DMZ after a bombing halt.<sup>81</sup>

As before, he refused to make the hard decisions, and he refused to take control of the war. Unwilling to admit that his policy was bankrupt, he continued to delude himself into believing that he could find a solution along the middle route. He continued to take recommendations from each side without giving in to either. He rejected the JCS proposals for expanding the air war, agreeing only to follow through with bombing targets already approved and then stabilize the war at that level. But he flatly rejected McNamara's most radical proposal, a bombing halt. In regard to ground operations, he would go no further than privately commit himself to review Westmoreland's search and destroy strategy at some undetermined point in the future.<sup>82</sup>

To resolve the dilemma posed by Katzenbach, Johnson attempted to slow down the runaway rabbit of dissent at home rather than speed up or shift the direction of the turtle of progress in Vietnam. In the late summer and early fall of 1967, he did what he had previously refused to do: he mounted a large-scale, many-faceted public relations campaign to rally support for the war. From behind the scenes, administration officials helped to organize the Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, an ostensibly private organization headed by former Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, the principal aim of which was to mobilize the "silent center."<sup>83</sup> A Vietnam Information Group was established in the White House to monitor public reactions to the war and deal with problems as they surfaced.<sup>84</sup> Johnson's advisers supplied to friendly senators, including some Republicans, information to help answer the charges of Congressional doves.

Believing that his major problem was a widespread perception that the war was a stalemate, the president designed much of his public relations campaign to persuade a skeptical public that the United States was in fact winning. He ordered the embassy and military command to "search urgently for occasions to present sound evidence of progress in Viet Nam." U. S. officials dutifully responded, producing reams of statistics to show a steady rise in enemy body counts and the number of villages pacified, and publishing captured documents to support such claims. The White House even arranged for influential citizens to go to Vietnam and observe the progress first-hand." As part of the public relations offensive, Westmoreland was brought home in November, ostensibly for top-level consultations, in fact to reassure a troubled nation. In a series of public statements he affirmed that "we have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view."<sup>86</sup>

The Communist Tet Offensive of 1968 cut the base from under the administration's public relations campaign. On January 31, 1968, the North Vietnamese launched a series of massive, closely coordinated attacks throughout the cities and towns of South Vietnam. As perhaps nothing else could have, the Tet Offensive put the lie to the administration's year-end claims of progress. Polls taken in late 1967 had shown a slight upswing in popular support for the war and even in the president's approval rating, but in the aftermath of Tet, support for the war and especially for the president plummeted and popular convictions of a stalemate became deeply imbedded.

Tet also forced Johnson to confront his strategic failure. After nearly two months of high-level deliberations focusing for the first time on crucial issues of how the war was being fought, he rejected new JCS proposals to expand the war and instituted some of the measures proposed by his civilian advisers in late 1967. He stopped the bombing beneath the twentieth parallel and launched major new initiatives to open peace negotiations. He placed a firm upper limit on the numbers of ground troops and removed Westmoreland

from command in Vietnam, kicking him upstairs to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He and his top advisers agreed that to ease pressures at home responsibility for the ground war should be shifted as rapidly as possible to the Vietnamese. Johnson's belated intervention came too late and did not go far enough to end the war, however, and he passed on to his successor a far more complex and intractable problem than he had inherited.

#### IV

To return to the question we began with: Why was the Vietnam War fought as it was? Certainly, Johnson's own highly personal style indelibly stamped the conduct of the war. The reluctance to provide precise direction and define a mission and explicit limits; the unwillingness to tolerate any form of intragovernmental dissent or permit a much-needed debate on strategic issues; the highly politicized approach that gave everybody something and nobody what they wanted and that emphasized consensus more than success on the battlefield or in the diplomatic councils; all these were products of a thoroughly political and profoundly insecure man, a man especially ill at ease among military issues and military people. The determination to dupe or co-opt advisers and the public rather than confront them candidly and forcefully also was a clear manifestation of the Johnson style, as was the tendency toward personalization of the domestic debate. Johnson repeatedly denied that Vietnam was his war. It was "America's war," he insisted, and "If I drop dead tomorrow, this war will still be with you."<sup>87</sup> In one sense, of course, he was right. But in terms of the way the war was fought, Vietnam was far more his than he was prepared to admit or even recognize.

Limited war theory also significantly influenced the way the war was fought. Korea and especially the Truman-MacArthur controversy stimulated a veritable cult of limited war in the 1950s and 1960s, the major conclusion of which was that in a nuclear age where total war was unthinkable limited war was essential. Robert McNamara, McGeorge and William Bundy, and Dean Rusk were deeply imbued with limited war theory, and it determined in many crucial ways their handling of Vietnam. Coming of age in World War II, they were convinced of the essentiality of deterring aggression to avoid a major war. Veterans of the Cuban Missile Crisis, they lived with the awesome responsibility of preventing nuclear conflagration and they were thus committed to fighting the war in "cold blood" and maintaining tight operational control over the military. They also operated under the mistaken assumption that limited war was more an exercise in crisis management than the application of strategy, and they were persuaded that gradual escalation offered the means to achieve their limited goals without provoking the larger war they so feared. Many of their notions turned out to be badly flawed.

It would be a serious mistake, however, to attribute American failure in Vietnam solely or even largely to the eccentricities of Johnson's personal style or the false dogmas of limited war theory. A considerable part of the problem lies in the inherent difficulty of limited war. Limited wars, as Stephen Peter Rosen has noted, are by their very nature "*strange wars*."<sup>88</sup> They combine political, military, and diplomatic dimensions in the most complicated way. Conducting them effectively requires rare intellectual ability, political acumen, and moral courage. Johnson and his advisers went into the conflict confident-probably overconfident- that they knew how to wage limited war, and only when the strategy of escalation proved bankrupt and the American people unwilling or

unable to fight in cold blood did they confront their tragic and costly failure. Deeply entangled in a war they did not understand and could find no way to win, they struggled merely to put a label on the conflict. "All-out limited war," William Bundy called it, "a war that is not a war" some military officers complained.<sup>89</sup> McPherson phrased it in the form of a question. "What the hell do you say? How do you half-lead a country into war?"<sup>90</sup>

The search for labels suggests, I think, the fundamental difficulties of limited war, and we must recognize in retrospect that there are no easy answers to the problems Johnson and his advisors confronted. The key military problem, Rosen contends, is "how to adapt, quickly and successfully, to the peculiar and unfamiliar *battlefield* conditions in which our armed forces are fighting."<sup>91</sup> That this was not done in Vietnam may reflect the limited vision of the political and military leaders, but it will not be easily done elsewhere. Nor is there any clearcut answer to the dilemma of domestic opinion. Fighting in cold blood seemed not to work in Vietnam. But there is no assurance that a declaration of war or partial mobilization was the answer. Johnson and Rusk's reservations about the dangers of a declaration of war were well taken, and Congressional sanction in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War did nothing to stop rampant and at times crippling domestic opposition. However much we might deplore the limitations of Johnson's leadership and the folly of limited war theory, they are not alone responsible for failure in Vietnam. Even in the post-Cold War world, we would be wise to accept Lady Bird Johnson's 1967 lament as a caveat: "It is unbearably hard to fight a limited war."

## Notes

1. See for example, Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, 1978); Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1981); and Andrew Krepinevich, *The U.S. Army in Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1986).
2. Wayne S. Cole, "American Entry into World War II: A Historiographical Appraisal," *The Mississippi Historical Review*, XLIII (March 1957), p.615.
3. Andrew Goodpaster oral history interview, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX.
4. Stephen Peter Rosen, "Vietnam and the American Theory of Limited War," *International Security* 7 (Fall 1982), p.96.
5. Bundy to Johnson, November 5, 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, National Security File, Bundy Memoranda, Box 5.
6. Bundy to Johnson, November 10, 1967, Johnson Papers, Diary Backup, Box 81.
7. Henry Brandon, *Anatomy of Error* (Boston, 1969), p.164; David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, 1972), pp.248, 633.
8. There is no good study of the civil-military conflict of the 1960s. For examples of the growing hostility, see Hanson Baldwin, "The McNamara Monarchy," *Saturday Evening Post* (March 9, 1963), pp. 8-9; Arleigh Burke to John McCain, March 18, 1963, copy in Hanson Baldwin Papers, Yale University Library, Box 9; for civilian hostility toward the military, see James G. Nathan, "The Tragic Enshrinement of Toughness," in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Vol.II: Since 1914* (New York, 1984), pp. 577-578.
- 9 Nathan, "Tragic Enshrinement of Toughness," pp.570-571.

10. For Johnson's populist observations on the military, see Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York, 1976), p.262.
11. Rosen, "Vietnam," p.96.
12. *Ibid.*, pp.90-99.
13. Quoted in Nathan, "Tragic Enshrinement of Toughness," p.569.
14. Rosen, "Vietnam," pp.93-96.
15. Michael Davidson, "Senior Officers and Vietnam Policymaking," *Parameters* XVI (Spring 1986), pp.55-57; see also "The Management Team," *Time* (February 5, 1965), pp. 22-23; "Joint Chiefs Wear a Different Hat," *Business Week* (July 30,1966), pp.68-72.
16. Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington, IN, 1976), p.160.
17. Valenti 's admonition is in Valenti to Johnson, November 14, 1964, quoted in Brian Van De Mark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York, 1990), p. 260n.
18. Some of the Joint Chiefs later claimed that they gave Johnson accurate estimates of what would be required. See Hanson Baldwin oral history interview, U.S. Naval Institute Library, Annapolis, MD, pp.710-711; Wallace Greene to Baldwin, September 25, 1975, *ibid.*; and Greene handwritten notes, Wallace M. Greene Papers, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC. For JCS disappointment at Johnson's refusal to mobilize the reserves, see Hanson Baldwin, "Military Disappointed," *New York Times*, July 29, 1965. For JCS minimizing of the difficulties, see Record of LBJ meeting with JCS, July 22, 1965, and record of meeting in cabinet room, July 22, 1965, both in Johnson Papers, Meeting Notes File, Box 1. Wheeler's "foot-in-the-door" strategy is articulated in Wheeler to Westmoreland, June 2, 1966, Backchannel Messages, Westmoreland/CBS Litigation Files, Record Group 407, Federal Records Center, Suitland, MD, Box 20.
19. See especially Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York, 1989), particularly chapters 3 and 4.
20. Krulak to Wallace M. Greene, July 19, 1965, Victor Krulak Papers, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC, Box 1.
- 21 Mark Perry, *Four Stars* (Boston, 1989), pp.156-158. Charles F. Brower, IV, "The Westmoreland 'Alternate Strategy' of 1967-1968," unpublished paper in possession of author, argues that as early as March 1967, Westmoreland himself was profoundly dissatisfied with the attrition strategy and "proposed an alternate strategy for Vietnam which implicitly recognized the weaknesses of attrition."
22. Krulak to Robert Cushman, May 25, 1967, Krulak Papers, Box 1.
23. John McNaughton to McNamara, May 6, 1967, quoted in Neil Sheehan and others, *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times* (New York, 1971), p.534.
24. McNamara Draft Presidential Memorandum, "Future Actions in Vietnam," May 19, 1967, Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Boxes 74-75.
25. Harold Johnson cable to Westmoreland, October 20, 1967, Backchannel Messages, Westmoreland/CBS Litigation Files, Box 20.
26. Johnson developed this technique into a fine art, of course, and it was his primary *modus operandi* in dealing with his various advisers, but the tendency itself is all too common in Vietnam policymaking and indeed in the American political system. For the way in which Richard Nixon operated in similar fashion, see George C. Herring, "The

Nixon Strategy in Vietnam," in Peter Braestrup, ed., *Vietnam as History: Ten Years After the Paris Peace Accords* (Washington, 1984), pp.51-58.

27. "I don't want loyalty. I want loyalty," Halberstam reports him saying. "I want him to kiss my ass in Macy's window at high noon and tell me it smells like roses." Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p.434.

28. Quoted in Henry Trehwitt, *McNamara* (New York, 1971), p.237.

29. George Ball oral history interview, LBJ Library. McNamara's disillusionment with the war seems to have begun much earlier and to have run much deeper than most scholars have assumed. See, for example, Averell Harriman memoranda of conversations with McNamara, May 14, 28, 30, August 22, 31, November 26, 1966, all in W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Box 486, and Harriman memorandum of conversation with McNamara, October 10, 1966, *ibid.*, Box 520. See also Paul Hendrickson, "Divided Against Himself," *Washington Post Magazine* (June 12, 1988), pp.20-31.

30. Paul Miles interview with Westmoreland, January 7, 1971, Paul Miles Papers, U.S. Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

31. Westmoreland historical briefing, July 12, 1967, William C. Westmoreland Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, Box 29.

32. Wheeler to Westmoreland, June 2, 1966, to Westmoreland and Sharp, February 13, 1967, to Sharp and Westmoreland, March 6, 1967, Backchannel Messages, Westmoreland/CBS Litigation File, Boxes 15, 16, 17.

33. Barry Zorthian oral history interview, LBJ Library.

34. Leonard Chapman oral history interview, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC; *New York Herald-Tribune*, August 22, 23, 1966; Greene to author, May 9, 1988.

35. Krulak to Greene, February 1, 1967, Krulak Papers, Box 1; Victor Krulak, "A Conflict of Strategies," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (November 1984), pp.85-87.

36. Walt Rostow memoranda, May 19, 20, 1967, Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Boxes 74-75

37. Sheehan and others, *Pentagon Papers*, p.539.

38. As early as 1966, Hanson Baldwin had detected among some Army officers growing criticism of the military leadership in Washington. By 1967, some military dissidents contemptuously dismissed the Joint Chiefs as the "five silent men" and ridiculed their "Charlie McCarthy answers" to LBJ's questions. See Baldwin to C. M. Peeke, September 6, 1966, Baldwin Papers, Box 13, and unpublished article, *ibid.*, Box 29; also, *New York Times*, July 13, 24, 1967.

39. Robert Ginsburgh memorandum for the record, August 14, 1967, Johnson Papers, National Security File, Name File/Col. Ginsburgh, Box 3. 40. Perry, *Four Stars*, pp.163-164. Perry's source for the story is an unnamed "former JCS flag rank officer." His account has been confirmed by a senior officer close to one of the deceased members of the JCS, but denied by General Wallace Greene and Admiral Thomas Moorer. Actually, rumors of a possible resignation en masse first surfaced at the time McNamara's departure was announced in late 1967 and were heatedly denied by administration officials. See *New York Times*, November 29, December 2, 4, 1967.

41. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1967* (Washington, 1968), II, pp. 816-7.

42. McNamara deposition for Westmoreland Trial, copy in LBJ Library, pp.113, 176, 322.
43. Record of meeting, LBJ, McNamara, Wheeler, Rusk and Rostow, August 19, 1967, Johnson Papers, Meeting Notes File, Box 1.
44. Washington Post, December 29, 1967.
45. Tom Johnson notes on NSC meetings, November 29, 1967, Johnson Papers, Tom Johnson Notes on Meetings, Box 1.
46. George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York, 1982), p.400; Larry Berman, *Planning A Tragedy* (New York, 1982), p.109; notes on meeting, July 21, 1965, Johnson Papers, Meeting Notes File, Box 1.
47. Ibid.
48. Berman, *Planning a Tragedy*, p.119.
49. See especially Richard Barnet, *Roots of War* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 266-306, and Michael Leigh, *Mobilizing Consent: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT, 1976), pp.99-106.
50. Rosen, "Vietnam," pp.85-86.
51. Van De Mark, *Into the Quagmire*, pp.163-164.
52. Bundy memorandum for the President, June 30, 1965, "France in Vietnam, 1954, and the U.S. in Vietnam, 1965-a Useful Analogy," Johnson Papers, National Security File, NSC History: Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Box 43.
53. Bill Moyers, "One Thing We Learned," *Foreign Affairs*, 46 (July 1968), p.662. A number of senior advisers interviewed by a RAND analyst in 1983 could not recall Ball's presentation at the July 21 meeting. Rusk later discounted Ball's estimates of casualties; McNamara claimed not to have seen his charts. David Di Leo, "Rethinking Containment: George Ball's Vietnam Dissent," Unpublished Ms. in possession of author, p.275.
54. Memorandum of conversation, Rusk and Harold Holt, April 28, 1965, "Asia and the Pacific: National Security Files, 1963-1969," (Frederick, MD, 1988), Reel 1, Frame 152.
55. Quoted in William Conrad Gibbons, "The 1965 Decision to Send U.S. Ground Forces to Vietnam," paper given at the International Studies Association, April 16, 1987.
56. Record of meeting, July 19, 1965, Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 15; Busby to LBJ, July 21, 1965, Johnson Papers, Busby Files, Box 3; Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago, 1985), p.149.
57. Kearns, *Johnson and the American Dream*, p.251.
58. Rusk's statement is in Michael Charlton and Anthony Moncrief, *Many Reasons Why: The American Involvement in Vietnam* (2nd ed., New York, 1989), p. 115; Johnson statement in notes on National Security Council meeting, July 27, 1965, Johnson Papers, Meeting Notes File, Box 1.
59. Quoted in Barbara Tuchman, *The March of Folly* (New York, 1984), p.326.
60. Notes on NSC Meeting, July 27, 1965, Johnson Papers, Meeting Notes File, Box 1.
61. Ibid.; Turner, *Dual War*, pp.149, 151.
62. Memo for the record, August 4, 1965, Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Boxes 196-197.
63. James Greenfield and William Jordan memorandum for Bill Moyers, August 13, 1965, Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Boxes 196-197.

64. Memorandum for the record, August 4, 1965; memorandum of discussion in Moyers's office, August 10, 1965; Greenfield and Jordan memorandum for Moyers, August 13, 1965; all in Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Boxes 196-197; Chester Cooper to Moyers, August 13, 1965, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam. Box 22.
65. Moyers memorandum, n.d., Johnson Papers, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 194; Benjamin Read to Bromley Smith, August 10, 1965, *ibid.*, Box 21; press release, November 5, 1965, Richard Dudman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Box 13.
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