

Iraq and Vietnam

Part I

What You Should Know About the Vietnam War Before Making Comparisons

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Participating were Joseph White Ph.D., Kenneth W. Grundy Ph.D., and Vincent E. McHale Ph.D, all of the Department of Political Science at Case Western Reserve University, and George C. Herring Ph.D., Alumni Professor of History Emeritus, University of Kentucky.

Professor White:

I don't want to start too soon, while people are wandering in, but I figure the first five minutes will be me talking and making introductions and people can miss that. Sorry, you can't.

I'm Joe White, I direct the Center for Policy Studies, and on behalf of the Center for Policy Studies, the Frederick K. Cox Center for International Law, and the Cleveland Council on World Affairs, it's my pleasure to welcome you to the first part of our series on Iraq and Vietnam.

The reason we're doing this series is that I have felt, since around the time the Iraqi invasion occurred, that many people were looking at this as a comparison to Vietnam, but that a lot of these comparisons were being made in ways that simply served peoples' beliefs. They were seeing what they wanted to see in it. Clearly, among people who do not approve of the involvement in Iraq there has been a sense that this is a quagmire just like Vietnam, but on the other side there have also been people who made analogies to Vietnam. Most visibly, in the most recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Mel Laird, President Nixon's Secretary of Defense, wrote an article, titled "Iraq and Vietnam," in which he made the argument that we should not make the mistake we made in Vietnam, of selling out our allies. And there's also reason to believe even that some of the people in the Bush administration themselves thought that we had faced in our foreign policy a Vietnam Syndrome, and sought to demonstrate the efficacy of American force in order to overcome that Vietnam Syndrome.

So I think that the comparison to Vietnam has lurked behind our policy choices and political debate in many, many ways throughout the situation in Iraq. And I'll just give you a couple of examples.

One is, in each case we are fighting an insurgency, and in each case there is some doubt about the capacity of the American military – which is very good at a lot of other things – to in fact engage successfully with an insurgency. And that's going to be the subject of our second gathering, in Amasa Stone Chapel on Monday, where Colonel T.X. Hammes, retired, U.S. Marine Corps, and Pete Moore of our political science department, will talk about that problem, the problem of putting down insurgencies.

Another similarity commonly claimed is that in Vietnam part of the problem was that we were trying with our military force to prop up a government that needed our support to survive, but the very fact that we were propping it up aroused opposition within the country and made it harder for the government to survive. And, clearly, you can make the exact same argument about Iraq: that some of the opposition at least to whatever government we are backing in Iraq is because it's backed by the foreign invaders. And for that discussion we will have Steven Biddle, who is listed in our advertising as with the Army War College but actually just moved to the Council on Foreign Relations as a Senior Fellow, and Rick Herrmann, who is Professor of Political Science at Ohio State and directs the Mershon Center for International Security Studies down there.

Another set of comparisons has to do with the international context and the domestic context.

In the international context, a common comparison would be that, well, it isn't working out well – the argument is made in each case, or has been made – but, if we leave, it will encourage enemies in other countries to oppose our interests or fight for their evil beliefs even harder. In Vietnam that was called the domino theory in relation to international communism, and in Iraq of course the argument is that if we leave, or when we leave, it will be interpreted by the jihadi's – even if we leave, leaving behind a government that is stable and that we like – it will be interpreted by the jihadi's, and promoted throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds, as a sign of their success in driving away the evil Americans, and therefore you should support jihadi's in other situations. So again, there's a version of the domino theory being argued. And that and many other similarities and differences, because there are a lot of differences, will be addressed by Professor Kathryn Lavelle of our political science department, in terms of the international context.

In terms of the domestic context there's a very straightforward connection. There is a long history of research on the connection between war, presidents, and public opinion. The more American troops die, the more support for the war and the president declines. And the author of the classic work on that is John Mueller of Ohio State, he will talk about that dynamic here in that final session here in the Thwing Center.

So, January 30 in Amasa Stone, February 1st and February 2nd same time, same station here in the Thwing Center. And I suspect that even that belief about American casualties probably has a lot to do with the Bush administration's policies. I suspect that one of the reasons why we didn't send many troops to Iraq is, they thought the fewer troops we send, the fewer get killed, and the less upset people get. And certainly one of the reasons we don't have a draft is that they made a judgment about the domestic politics of that. So even when there aren't parallels between the situation in Vietnam and the situation in Iraq, some of that is because people drew conclusions about Vietnam and they're trying not to do that again with the situation in Iraq.

But I hope we will see, in our discussions and our presentations, that there are also some very significant differences. My goal in this series is to get people to think about the situation in Iraq, and to think seriously about the analogies, for better or worse, to the situation in Vietnam as a way of thinking about the situation in Iraq.

Vietnam of course is not the only analogy that has been made; you may remember that a Munich analogy was made in 2003 and 2002. We have to be very careful about analogies. But a lot of how we think is about analogies, as a way of focusing discussion, and I hope that this series does that for you.

For today, it is a great pleasure to start out by making the point that there's a lot you ought to know about Vietnam before making comparisons. You have to think hard about Vietnam in the first place. And I am very, very pleased to be able to welcome to campus Professor George Herring of the University of Kentucky, who is the author of what most political scientists and historians, I think, consider the most basic and reliable source overview of the Vietnam War. It's called *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950 – 1975*. It is in its fourth edition now; it's used in many classes on the Vietnam war that are taught in history and political science courses. When I started asking around to find out, "who should I get?" to talk about Vietnam, it was pretty unanimous, "if you can get George Herring you should," and so it is a great pleasure to welcome Professor Herring to campus.

He will talk about the Vietnam War, and then there will be comments from two colleagues whom a number of you presumably know well. Vince McHale, Professor of Political Science, who did hard duty as chair of the Political Science department for I believe 27 years, I know how hard that duty is, and who remains a distinguished and highly appreciated member of our faculty. And Ken Grundy, Marcus Hanna Professor emeritus in the department of political science at Case, who remains a deeply regretted and missed former member of our faculty. So I would like to ask Professor Herring and Professor Grundy and Professor McHale to come up now. And I should explain that when we do questions we are recording, because I would like to provide a transcript that we can post on our website for anyone who is interested. So when we do questions I'd like to ask you to come up to the microphone, get in line, that way we don't have to decide who gets to talk, and speak into the microphone so that it can be recorded.

So thank you very much, and welcome to our professors.

9:00

Professor Herring:

Thank you very much Joe, it's a real pleasure to be here, and thank all of you for coming out this afternoon. When Joe first discussed the possibility of my coming to Cleveland in January, I must confess that I was a little dubious about that; but, I'm retired now, my wife and I are heading to Florida for a month on Sunday, so I thought, "well, why not come up and see a little winter; then I can appreciate the Florida sunshine more when I get back." It's a great pleasure to be here, and I really applaud the program that Joe has put together. It's kind of like the weather, again, Vietnam and Iraq are something that everybody talks about, but nobody really does anything systematic about. So I think this is a great opportunity to understand where we are today, if not to understand exactly what we need to do, by comparing this dilemma we find with one in the recent past.

Historians ought to know better than to make predictions. I think the one thing that's predictable about history is its unpredictability. And that said, with a lot more courage than intelligence or foresight, shortly after 9-11 I, who rarely make predictions of any kind, pronounced the so-called Vietnam Syndrome that Joe talked about dead. Absolutely dead. That is to say, that in the aftermath of the horrors of the world trade center, bitter memories of our participation in that war appeared to me to have been wiped away, along with lingering public reluctance to send American troops abroad. In my defense, I'll quickly add that I wasn't alone. The New York Times had an editorial sometime in October of that year also proclaiming the death of the Vietnam Syndrome.

Now, as you know, our predictions turned out to be off-base. By the Summer of 2003, with the rise of an insurgency in post-Saddam Iraq, comparisons with Vietnam were being drawn once again. And as you've seen particularly over the last six months, as this insurgency dragged into its third year, the analogies have become more and more frequent. As Joe suggested, those who want the United States out of Iraq warn ominously that it is becoming or has become another Vietnam; on the other side there's Mel Laird's article in Foreign Affairs magazine arguing that, by golly, his Vietnamization program worked in the sixties and seventies and it could be a model for Iraqization today.

So we meet here tonight then in the first of a series of panels to determine how to make useful comparisons between the two wars. And my task, a daunting one indeed, is to try to suggest to you in thirty minutes or so what we need to know about Vietnam before we start making these comparisons. So I propose to do that with a sort of overview approach. A brief look at how the war began; why the United States became involved; a longer look at some of the essential characteristics of what I've called American's Longest War, and then conclude with some very, very brief thoughts on why that war ended as it did. And as I do these things, I hope and I suspect that you can be sort of seeing in your own mind where and how these comparisons with today seem to work out.

OK, first how did the Vietnam War begin? And I think most of us would agree that we Americans are notoriously ethnocentric. We believe that wars start when we get involved and end when we leave. So I think it's important first to remind those of us who need reminding that, for the Vietnamese, this war lasted almost three decades. It begins in 1946, as a war for independence on the part of the Vietnamese and particularly the organization, the Viet Minh, against French colonialism – part of that broader post-World War II pattern that we call decolonization, a process or phenomenon that dramatically reshaped the process of world politics after the war.

The Viet Minh war against France lasted from 1946 to 54. The Viet Minh defeated the French at Dienbienphu in May 1954, one of the truly decisive battles of the 20th century; but at the Geneva Conference that followed shortly after, for a whole variety of complex reasons the Viet Minh was not able to translate into political success the victory that it won on the battlefield. Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel, pending elections that were to be held within two years. For the time being the Viet Minh held power above that line; below that line, the remnants of a French-sponsored government backed by the United States held sway. The United States and South Vietnam subsequently refused to participate in those elections, the elections were never held.

The first Indochina war in the late 1950s morphed into a second Indochina war when those remnants of the Viet Minh that were still in the southern part of Vietnam began to rebel against the American-backed government of Ngo Dinh Diem. North Vietnam then begins to send men and supplies down what would later be called the fabled Ho Chi Minh trail to support the southern insurgency, and by 1959 what the Vietnamese called the American War was underway.

Now the next question is, why would the United States involve itself in, and eventually make an enormous commitment in blood and treasure in a land in which it had had scant interest and involvement before 1950?

15:43

The key factor here, that's got to be kept in mind all the way through the process, is the cold war. At exactly the same time the war was heating up between the Viet Minh and the French, the post-world-war-II cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union was taking form; first in Europe, then in East Asia after the fall of China to Mao Zedong's communists in 1949. The linkage between these wars resides in the fact that the Viet Minh leadership, particularly in the form of the top leader, Ho Chi Minh, were old line communists going back to the 1920s. This is not true in other anti-colonial rebellions; in Vietnam it has a profound impact. The United States assumes Ho's Viet Minh to be part of a larger, monolithic, international communist drive controlled and directed by Moscow. And in the context of a fragile global balance of power, a sort of zero-sum game in which any loss for us is a gain for them and vice versa, Vietnam for the first time in the 1950s assumes enormous importance for the United States.

We fear that through the workings of the domino theory that Joe mentioned, if Vietnam fell to communism then the rest of resource-rich southeast Asia might fall. Americans worried that the failure to maintain the South Vietnamese government we had sponsored there would undermine our credibility, again as was mentioned. It had a domestic political function in light of the domestic political fallout after the fall of China in 1949. Politicians, especially Democratic party politicians, feared that the fall of another country to communism could be deadly to their political fortunes. And so, from 1950 to 1965, we gradually increased our commitment in South Vietnam, until by the Summer of 1965 we were involved in full-scale war.

Now I think there are a couple of more points that we need to make about this “run-up” to war, to borrow a term from more recent history. First is the incremental nature of the U.S. commitment. In 1950, despite deep reservations about supporting French colonialism, which is the way it would turn out, we began to assist the French war in Vietnam; and within a couple of years we were paying roughly 80 percent of the cost of that war. In 1954, after the Geneva conference and despite the provisions of that conference, the Eisenhower administration committed itself to support an independent, non-communist nation in the southern half of Vietnam. 1961, Kennedy drastically increased military aid and advisers, to help South Vietnam fend off a growing insurgency. 1965, another step in the process, the Johnson administration made an open-ended commitment to defeat the insurgency, now backed by North Vietnamese regular forces that had come down the Ho Chi Minh trail into South Vietnam. I suppose rather than a run-up in this case, it might be considered somewhat like a 15 year marathon.

Point two: the United States went to war in Vietnam abysmally ignorant of the history and culture of people whose destiny it presumed to shape. Following logically from this ignorance was a blind overconfidence in our ability to dictate the outcome we sought at acceptable cost. To be sure there were reservations. Lyndon Johnson himself, in those wonderful telephone conversations – I don’t know if any of you have read any of those or listened to them, but they’re a fascinating way to eavesdrop on the White House at a critical point – on more than one occasion Johnson fretted about the difficulties of fighting a war in Vietnam, and several times he anticipates with uncanny prescience pretty much what’s going to happen over the next three years. On one occasion before 1965 he made a statement that anybody contemplating war really ought to be required to listen to, and it goes something like this, and even as a Kentuckian I won’t try to imitate his Texas drawl, but it goes like this: **“It’s a hell of a lot easier to get into a war than to get out.”**

But the general attitude was that Asians in black pajamas would be no match for American military power. “When we marched into the rice paddies on that damp March afternoon,” Marine Lieutenant Philip Caputo later recalled, “we carried along with our rifles and packs the implicit conviction that the Vietnamese would be quickly beaten.” “Should the North Vietnamese intervene in force,” the chairman of the Joint Chiefs told Lyndon Johnson in 1965, “we will cream them.”

Finally, I think it's worth noting that by the time Johnson took the nation to war in 1965, the rationale for that war already was under challenge in the United States. Johnson's own sort of casual disregard for the truth had already brought forth what had been called a credibility gap. There's an old joke some of you may remember from that time: "When is Lyndon Johnson telling the truth? When he scratches his head he's telling the truth, when he pulls his sizeable ear he's telling the truth, but when his lips start to move, that's when he stops telling the truth." Critics with increasing vigor started questioning whether the war in Vietnam was, as he and others insisted, in fact a product of the cold war, or rather was an effort on the part of Vietnamese nationalists to unify their country and rid it of foreign influence. The critics would increase in number, their voices would grow louder, as the war dragged on and its costs increased.

The Third and really crucial question and the one where I think most of the comparisons will come forth one way or the other: what kind of war was it? And I think the short and broad answer is that it was the most complex, baffling, frustrating war this nation has fought. A war of so many different dimensions and so many different conundrums.

Critics often charge that the objective was unclear; now that's pure nonsense. The goal was perfectly clear: to preserve an independent, non-communist South Vietnam against the challenge posed by the National Liberation Front insurgency and North Vietnamese regular forces. The problem the question, was how to do this in light of the many difficulties faced.

23:15

The essential problem, and I would argue – there are those that differ with me, obviously – is the very weakness of the South Vietnamese government. In seeking to establish and maintain an independent, non-communist government in South Vietnam, we attempted a truly formidable undertaking on the basis of a very, very flimsy foundation. The country to which we first committed ourselves in 1954 was, I would argue, a country in name only. Indeed, I would argue that had we looked all over the world in 1954, '55, we might not have found a less promising place in which to conduct an experiment in nation-building.

The French had provided very little basis for nationhood there. The government we inherited from them was the remnants of a puppet government they had established only in 1949, very belatedly. Southern Vietnam was torn apart by a multitude of conflicting forces, religious, political, ethnic: "a political jungle," one scholar has written, "of warlords, bandits, partisan troops and secret societies." For nearly ten years we struggled to build something there, to build a viable nation in the face of an insurgency within and a veritable invasion from outside, but we could never really find leaders capable of mobilizing the nation. The fact that we had to look for them speaks volumes itself I think. We launched a vast array of expensive programs to promote sound if not democratic government; "win the hearts and minds of the people" in the phrase of the day, a phrase that has been resurrected for today's war; and defeat the National Liberation Front insurgency. When our client state was near collapse in 1965 we filled a

vacuum with our own forces, but the rapid collapse of South Vietnam after we withdrew our military forces in 1973 suggests I think how little was actually accomplished.

On the other side, from beginning to end we drastically underestimated the strength and determination of our adversary. I don't wish to imply here that they were some sort of super-people or to assign them moral legitimacy of any kind. They made colossal blunders. They paid an enormous price for their eventual victory. They've shown a far greater capacity for making war than building a nation. They continue to operate what in many ways is a police state. But in this war they had distinct advantages. They had gained some claim to legitimacy by defeating the French. They were tightly mobilized and fanatically committed to their goals. They employed methods already perfected in the war against France. Using a combination of terror and positive inducements, like land reform, the NLF or what was called then the Viet Cong waged a highly effective rural insurgency, controlling by 1965 as much as 2/3 of the countryside of South Vietnam where much of the population lived. The North Vietnamese and NLF developed a strategy of "protracted war," perceiving that the Americans like the French before them would weary of the war, become impatient, and if they bled long enough might leave. "You'll kill ten of our men, we'll kill one of yours," Ho Chi Minh once remarked, "and in the end it is you who will retire." Actually he said this to the French in 1946, but it's a commentary on the American war as well.

Another point crucial to understanding the Vietnam war, something Joe again referred to, is the international context in which it was fought, again the cold war. The cold war explains why we fought in Vietnam; it also explains to a large degree how we fought; and helps explain why it came out as it did. We never set out to win this war in the traditional sense. We didn't seek to defeat North Vietnam as we had defeated Germany and Japan in World War II. On the contrary, vivid memories of Chinese intervention in Korea in 1950; even more close memories and vivid memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962; led the Johnson administration to wage a carefully managed, some would say micromanaged, limited war. We chose to fight this war, in Secretary of State Dean Rusk's words, "in cold blood," fearing that full-scale mobilization might trigger alliances among the communist nations and provoke a larger war, maybe even a nuclear war. Johnson did not seek a declaration of war from Congress. He did not mobilize the reserves, except very late to a very small extent – a Kentucky national guard unit went in 1968 as one of the very few that fought there. The war was fought by draftees and volunteers. That's the way Johnson chose to fight it. And between 1965 and '68 the administration went to great lengths to keep the war limited. It escalated the war gradually and quietly, to minimize the danger of any confrontation with the Soviet Union and China. U.S. officials behind the scenes repeatedly assured these nations that our goals were limited. They scrupulously avoided the sort of rash moves that MacArthur had made in 1950, that might provoke a Soviet or Chinese response. Johnson refused to permit the military to, formally at least, to pursue North Vietnamese or Viet Cong units into their sanctuaries across the 17th Parallel or into Laos or Cambodia. He restricted the bombing near the Chinese border. He lived in mortal terror, by his own accounts, that an American pilot – in his most vivid nightmare this pilot was from Johnson City Texas, his

hometown – would drop a bomb down the smokestack of a Soviet freighter in Haiphong Harbor, and there would be World War III.

Now I think there's good reason for Johnson's caution. No one can know what would have happened if, but I think there's ample evidence that a serious threat to destroy North Vietnam would have brought the Soviet Union and China into the war. But by the same token, limiting the war in this way seriously complicates the achievement of his war aims. Gradual escalation gives the other side time to adapt and adjust: in the case of North Vietnam, to shield its resources and to develop the deadliest air defense system known in the history of warfare. Deeply committed to the achievement of their goals, North Vietnamese leaders on the other side countered our limited war with an all-out war on their own; an asymmetrical conflict that helps neutralize America's superior military economy. At the same time, as each level of escalation between '65 and '68 failed, we moved to the next level: more bombing, more troops. Until ultimately there is a bombing campaign against North Vietnam that exceeds all of the bombs dropped by all of the nations during World War II; and we have a half million troops in South Vietnam. "An all-out limited war," one U.S. official calls it, without any apparent sense of the contradictions in his words.

The cold war works to North Vietnam's advantage in other ways. The Soviet Union and China are engaged in their own conflict at this time, a cold war as it were within a cold war. And North Vietnam is able to use this to get maximum support from both of these allies while maintaining control over the war, over its own future, itself. And so the Soviets provide modern fighter planes and surface-to-air missiles; the Chinese provide huge quantities of small arms, vehicles, and food; total Soviet and Chinese aid estimated somewhere in the neighborhood of two billion dollars; again, it does a lot to neutralize U.S. military operations.

We, on the other side, fight with very limited allied support. To be sure, Australia and South Korea send sizeable forces. We subsidized much of South Korea's effort. New Zealand, the Phillipines and Nationalist China contribute small contingents. But the European allies and Japan resist. Johnson arm twists, he browbeats, he uses the notorious "Johnson treatment," where he would get you into a room, get in your face and stay there with you until you gave him what he wanted; they resist, only nominal aid if at all. In the case of Britain one time he says, "all I want is a platoon of bagpipers," not even that did he get from the British. Charles De Gaulle's France – surprise, surprise – which had already had its own defeat in Vietnam, openly opposes the U.S. war.

From 1965 to '68 then we steadily escalate the war, expand the bombing, increase the number of ground troops. The idea of the bombing and search and destroy operations is to inflict enough pain so that the North Vietnamese will stop the war. In fact, the best that can be achieved is a stalemate. "Each American blow," one journalist wrote, "was like a sledgehammer on a floating cork." An apt metaphor, I think; somehow the cork refused to stay down.

We also invested great effort and great expense in what was then called, and we're talking about it again, "nation-building": trying to build a viable South Vietnamese government that could stand on its own. But again, I think the results are limited. That government is never able to gain broad popular support among its own people. The Americanization of the war after 1965 has a really debilitating effect on the nation we're trying to build; there's a conflict there, a built-in conflict, hugely important. It induces a sense of dependence among people whose independence we profess to be supporting. As the Americans took over a great part of the fighting, the South Vietnamese army seemed content to sit on its guns. The infusion of vast American funds undermines the economy and increases corruption. Intensive bombing of many parts of South Vietnam undercuts the nation-building we're seeking to work at the same time. And as the war expands the tensions between Americans and South Vietnamese grow: more and more suspicious of each other, even hostile towards each other.

35:18

Many South Vietnamese undoubtedly appreciate the help the United States is providing, but they also come to resent the American way of doing things. They especially resent the domineering manner of the Americans. They come to consider, again words with which we're familiar, "the American occupation" a demoralizing scourge. On the other side, Americans caught in a strange land, a strange war they don't understand with people whose language and culture they really aren't familiar with, many grow resentful and angry. It's a problem at many points, in many ways, determining who is friend and who's foe; a very fundamental part of warfare, I think you will agree. They resent that the South Vietnamese don't seem to appreciate their sacrifices. And in time the anger and bitterness can pour forth in atrocities. You're familiar with My Lai; you may have seen a series in the Toledo Blade last year and it's coming out in book form this Spring about the Tiger Force in the central highlands which carries out a brutal campaign against civilians in Summer of 1967. And of course, as the war drags on, opposition within the United States increases to unprecedented proportions.

Nothing totally new about this; dissent in war, I remind you, is as American as cherry pie. But still it's true that this war arouses more widespread and passionate opposition than others. It comes at a time when Americans are questioning their values and institutions as perhaps no other time in their history. The sort of verities of the cold war are under challenge at this time. And so this war divides America as nothing since the debate over slavery a century earlier. It spurs all sorts of acts of individual protest, street demonstrations, teach-ins, lie-ins, burning of draft cards, 25 to 50,000 Americans fled to Canada, five Americans emulating Vietnamese Buddhists' acts of protest burn themselves to death in public protests, one under the Pentagon office of Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara. Of course as the war drags on the protests mount, the divisions deepen, public support for the war wanes.

John Mueller will talk about this more later. I totally agree with his argument that the real key to mounting public opposition is the rising cost in blood and treasure: the number of lives lost, Johnson's request for tax increase in '67, as well as the idea that the

war has become a stalemate and no progress is being made; these are the critical factors. And I think the “tipping point,” to use a term that has come into parlance recently, comes in the Fall and Summer of 1967. It’s at this point that polls begin to drop below 50 percent support for the war. Johnson’s approval rating is even lower. Newspapers begin to, if not question the war itself question the way it’s being fought. Democratic and Republican legislators start to jump ship.

In October 1967 – and this will all sound a lot like, apologies to Yogi Berra, “déjà vu all over again” when you think back to last Fall – in October of 1967 one of Johnson’s advisers, in terms of one of Aesop’s best-known fables, poses the dilemma for him: can the tortoise of progress in Vietnam stay ahead of the hare of dissent at home? Johnson’s answer to the dilemma was to mount a massive public relations campaign in the Fall of ’67. A whole series of presidential speeches and press conferences; calling the generals back from Saigon; the whole thing to demonstrate to a skeptical public that progress was being made. And interestingly enough, it worked for the short run. The polls went back up in December of 1967. But there’s a cruel irony here, in the sense that when the massive North Vietnamese/NLF Tet Offensive came in February 1968, the response to that was probably worse than it might have been otherwise had not public optimism been raised in the fall of 1967. It causes another sharp drop in support for the war and especially for Johnson himself. As many of you recall, it forced him in late March, 1968 to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam, put a ceiling on U.S. ground forces, open peace negotiations in Paris, and withdraw from the presidential campaign.

One of Richard Nixon’s solutions to what by this time may have been a problem without a solution was called “Vietnamization” – another word again that has been in the news lately as a precursor in the eyes of some and a model for what’s going on today. The idea here is to steady a faltering home front by withdrawing U.S. troops. In the meantime, the other side of the idea was that security would be maintained by building up South Vietnamese forces to take over from the Americans the burden of fighting the NLF and North Vietnamese. Former Secretary Laird has recently argued that this is working. I disagree. Progress in Vietnamization was spotty at best. Some units were very good, others were not good at all, all of them had been trained to rely on U.S. air support and logistic support and without it they had a very hard time fighting effectively.

41:45

This leads to my final question and a conclusion: why did the war end as it did in April 1975 with a massive North Vietnamese invasion in a mere 55 days overrunning South Vietnam and finally bringing the country together after thirty years of fighting?

Former Secretary Laird and others have an answer to this question. Vietnamization had worked, they claim. Kissinger in 1972 and 1973 had negotiated a workable peace agreement that with continued U.S. support would have worked. It was Congress who, by its aid cuts for South Vietnam undercut all of this, and caused South Vietnam’s defeat at the hands of North Vietnam. Again, I don’t agree with this argument.

As I've suggested already, I think Vietnamization was at best a partial success, a limited success. It doesn't take even a close look at the '73 peace agreement to see its flaws. It left a hundred and fifty thousand North Vietnamese troops in the south. It actually provided for the eventual dissolution of the Saigon government, hardly a recipe for its survival. Congressional aid cuts certainly hurt South Vietnam, but the main reason for Nixon's inability to enforce a flawed peace agreement was Watergate, an act of his own making. The result, ironically again – it kind of shows how everything here is interconnected – of his own efforts to suppress dissent against the war.

But again, I really think we need to look much beyond this to get a fuller answer to the outcome of the war. Yeah, our strategy was flawed; yeah, dissent at home played a part; but we are inclined to limit the question to why we failed, again reflecting the ethnocentricity I spoke of earlier. We also need to look at why the other side succeeded. Now, as I've tried to suggest here, I think the fundamental weakness of South Vietnam, the absolute unrelenting commitment of North Vietnam, its willingness to make whatever sacrifices were necessary to prevail, were crucial to the outcome.

Just a word on analogies, to follow up on what Joe said and to take it from here. Some guidance maybe in terms of the comparisons over the next couple of weeks. In making analogies and comparisons, I think we have to have very precise assessments of what is similar and what is different in these situations. No two historical situations are identical. And to try to look at one and draw implicit lessons, say, from that to apply to another, can only be deceptive and misleading.

Analogies can help us understand today's events. They will not tell us how they are going to come out; god knows, if that were the case historians would be in demand everywhere and I can assure you that's not the way it is; or give us precise guidance on how to deal with the problems. Historian George Elton (?) once wrote that, "history can teach us to think more deeply, more completely, and on the basis of an enormously enlarged experience about what it may be possible or desirable to do." "The true use of history," Michael Howard has written, "is not to make us clever for the next time, but to make us wise forever."

Thank you very much.

45:40

Professor White

Thank you very, very much Professor Herring. I'd like to ask Ken Grundy and then Vince McHale to favor us with their comments.

Professor Grundy

Well, the very fact that we're talking about the Vietnamese war means that we accept the premise that historical experience might be useful in helping us comprehend the Iraqi

experience. But if you think you're going to get closure from me, you may as well leave right now. I'm simply going to make some suggestions about what role historical analogies can and do play in politics and in policy-making and in the public's perception of current events.

Let me give you a few examples. July 21st, 1965. It's a meeting of the National Security Council, Lyndon Johnson and his top advisers. The question is whether we should commit another hundred thousand American troops to South Vietnam. Undersecretary of State George Ball argues effectively that we shouldn't send extra troops. And he is immediately jumped on by McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk, Robert MacNamara, and finally U.S. Ambassador to Saigon Henry Cabot Lodge, who finishes his statement as follows: "I feel there is a greater threat to start World War III if we don't go in. Can't we see the similarity to our own indolence at Munich?"

Now policy-makers have been invoking historical parallels, usually in support of their positions, from time immemorial. Sometimes it gets silly. The early months of WWI, and the United States is confronted by British naval power, and there is an actual fear on the part of President Woodrow Wilson that we may end up going to war with Great Britain. And he draws this analogy: "Madison and I are the only two Princeton men who have become Presidents. The circumstances of the War of 1812 therefore and those now run parallel. I sincerely hope we will not go further."

The desire to avoid another world war in the 1930s led to people in Europe and the United States invoking the "no more Summers of 1914" argument, leading to the soft decisions at Munich. Congress enacted 40 neutrality acts between 1935 and 1939, to prevent the United States from following the 1917 example. And after Munich became the symbol of acquiescence to aggression we got the "no more Munichs" syndrome after World War II and into the Cold War. Over Korea, this was a favorite argument of Harry Truman and President Douglas MacArthur. Over Suez, this was a favorite argument of Anthony Eden. Over Nicaragua, about appeasing the Sandinistas. "No more Pearl Harbors" found its champions; John Kennedy used that argument against going to war over Cuba, because he thought we'd be accused of Pearl Harbor in this instance. And then of course the "no more Cuba" arguments, as communists in this hemisphere began to pop up in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere.

So today, those who argue "no more Munichs" find themselves opposed by those who say "no more Vietnams." In other words, people are drawing historical parallels however they want to, for their own ends. It's invariably self-serving. It is based on the premise that two events, separated by time, if they are similar in one respect, then they may also agree in other respects.

For the Bush administration the argument might run something like this: 'Appeasement at Munich occurred as a result of the allies doing nothing at a crucial point in order to stop Hitler. Appeasement over Iraq is an outgrowth of the United Nations' inaction in the face of provocation. Appeasement at Munich resulted in World War II; therefore appeasement of Iraq will result at some point in a wider world war. We must therefore

act decisively.’ There are lots of instances of American policy-makers and opponents of policy resorting to historical analogies, and they’re frequently misguided.

But we cannot not use history. That’s our dilemma. What else is there to base policy on? Are we going to base policy on ideology? We’ve been complaining about that for months now. The question is, how can we use history better? And of course the question presupposes that policy-makers in fact use history for policy guidance. Skeptical people seem to argue that analogies are used more to justify and to advocate than they are for analysis. Schlesinger once said, “the past is an enormous grab-bag, with a prize in there for everyone.” Maybe using historical analogy is nothing more than a means of dignifying a conclusion that we’ve arrived at for other reasons. And at worst, historical analogies become buzzwords, Pavlovian signals, expected to make us salivate on demand. We can’t be sure. Those who opposed the American invasion of Iraq figured, ‘lets bring up the wrenching experience of Vietnam. We know that most Americans who have lived through it don’t want an encore, and it’s easier than formulating careful, real arguments as to why this war is ethically wrong, illegal, unwise, counterproductive, or whatever.’

If policy-makers use historical analogies poorly, why is it? Is it because they’re stupid? Do they not know enough history, or do they not know enough history well? Remember the Vietnam cohort: Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, Schlesinger himself, George Ball. The best and the brightest. Were they stupid? But they were also true believers, in the sense that they felt ready to employ social-science-based policy-making in order to promote economic development and to stabilize the geopolitical status quo. They knew they were functioning in a larger context, a world of communist expansion and U.S.-Soviet relations and U.S. – Chinese relations. And they bought in, at least in the early stages, to the domino theory. Are the neo-con true believers well-informed about modern history? Ask yourselves.

Rather, I would maintain there’s something about the psychology of analogical reasoning that makes it hard to use historical analogy well in foreign policy-making. The psychology of analogical reasoning begins with the idea that human beings are creatures of limited cognitive capacity. This means they cope with an enormous amount of information by relying on knowledge structures; such as ideologies or frameworks or analogies. These help them order, interpret, and simplify, and thereby to make sense of complexity; kind of a shorthand evoking negative or positive vibes depending on the circumstances. We do it all the time. You encounter new circumstances, you look to the past for surface similarities. But that’s the problem, you look for surface similarities. Once an historical match is accessed, then we often use it to go beyond the information we were provided. We read a lot more into the situation than we can legitimately do on the basis of our knowledge.

So historical analogies for me do two things. They’re a tool for advocacy and persuasion, that is they’re an instrumental thing. But they nonetheless play a part in our policy-making, in the way we think about and analyze the world. And even when the analogy in question doesn’t appear favorable, there’s something about the hubris, and pride, that

entraps us. The Nixon administration when it came to power in 1969 was as convinced that they could extricate us from Vietnam in less than a year as was the Bush administration convinced that the war and its aftermath would be short and sweet. It is the arrogance of knowing that your opponents are evil, wrong, stupid; of knowing that you are the avatar of righteousness. The historical conditions can be strikingly different; the mindsets of those in command are frighteningly the same. Thank you.

57:00

Professor McHale

There's an upside and a downside to going last. The downside is, a lot of the good stuff has already been mentioned. The upside is, I don't have much time, so bear with me. Professor Herring is a veteran; I am a Vietnam-era veteran though I didn't serve in Vietnam. And I think when Joe was putting together this panel he had to bring out a bunch of old fogies like us who actually lived through that period.

Americans are really funny about war. I read in the paper the other day that IBM was looking to invest millions of dollars in Vietnam. You must know, if you read the travel pages in the newspaper, especially in the New York Times, Vietnam's become a tourist destination. I look at Senator John McCain, who was tortured and held prisoner and so on; he talks very favorably about Vietnam. I want to tell a little story, I'm hesitating to think about this, but I like Japanese food and one of my favorite restaurants in the Cleveland area is Shuhei. I know the owner very well, and I was out at a dinner maybe about two years ago, and Hiroshi who owns it was standing in the doorway of the kitchen. And I looked at him, and I thought, "what the hell am I doing here? They bombed us in Pearl Harbor. We dropped two atomic bombs, the only country that had atomic bombs dropped on them, during the war." And he comes over to the table and he says how are you doing Vince and so on, we're great friends. Think about that; maybe there's a light at the end of the tunnel here, that after we do defeat a country and do all the damage that maybe sometime in the future Iraq will be a great tourist destination; I don't know.

One of the problems with history, and I thought about this. I was teaching during the Vietnam war, and I thought about this. I asked my students, years from now your children are going to ask you about this period: what did you think? What were your positions? How did you react? One of the problems with reconstructing history is it's very hard to get ahold of the perceptions and the feeling and the culture and the atmosphere of what actually went on. And I think we've got to take that into consideration when we begin to make analogies, because in many ways hindsight is cheap. We have to go back, as Professor Herring pointed out, to really look at this global system, and think what it was like during the cold war. I mean, it was 1962 when we had the Cuban Missile crisis. I was an undergraduate, I was worried about war breaking out, as I go back to that period now I think, my God, how close we really were to war. So you had the cold war, you had the revolution in China in 1949. You were just a couple of years off, maybe ten years or so, from Korea, a similar situation, a divided country where

the north invades the south. So it was a real tense atmosphere. And I think one of the things that we need to look at when we go back in history is to look at the perceptions of decision-makers and the people that informed the decision-makers.

Professor Herring's book I think is excellent but I also would recommend a publication that's just come out now. It's about this thick and it contains the declassified reports, national intelligence estimates, of the National Intelligence Council. And as you go through these reports you kind of get the flavor of what people were thinking then, what were their ideas. Because we don't know the future, we're flying in the dark. You find, for example, an awful lot of conflict. Somehow when we go back to that period we think everything was straightforward, there was no dissent and so on. There was one heck of a lot of dissent, by a lot of people, as to what was going to happen, as to what strategies were likely to work. I think you also have to look at the personalities, particularly at the beginning stages. People like John Foster Dulles who was Secretary of State; Allen Dulles at CIA. These were people that had a particular mindset, and that fight against communism was something that I think drove a lot of their decision-making, their advice to policy-makers and so on. There's a little dispute about the Eisenhower administration, as to whether Ike was really in control, delegated things to committees and so on and so forth. If that was the case, certainly the Dulles brothers had an awful lot to say about foreign policy. And one of the things that does come out is this domino effect. The idea that – there were two things that the United States government always worried about in the early days, right in the immediate postwar period. One, that a communist government would come to power by legitimate means. The case was Italy, and that didn't happen. The other was that there would be a significant communist victory in a particular region of the world that would lead to other communist states and of course the last domino to fall was Japan. And that was their mindset, and that's what they really believed in.

I think a lot of times when we look at war historically, it's a stumbling effect. It's like public policy, it's very hard to put boundaries around public policy. You get a lot of incremental decisions that of course, after it's all over you look back and say, I can see, that's policy. But again, my perception of that era, of the Vietnam conflict, would be a lot of decisions that were made incrementally that ended up with the situation that eventually prevailed.

I think we underestimated, talking about analogies of Iraq and Vietnam, I think there was great underestimation of the role of Ho Chi Minh. He was one of those figures that was larger than life in history, and he meant something to all of the Vietnamese, not just the communist part, but he was really their hero. And there are reports, if you read the National Intelligence Council, the declassified versions, where Ho Chi Minh had admitted on a number of occasions there was no way he was going to let the French begin, and there was no way Vietnam was going to be dominated by any outside power. You don't have that in Iraq. If you had it maybe it was Saddam, but he's gone. There is nobody on the surface that one can point to and say, this is the hero of Iraq historically.

I think the other thing two that we tend to underestimate is the ability of many of these countries to pursue a policy of national liberation. I'm sure everybody in this room has

seen Godfather I. If there is anybody who hasn't seen it I'm sorry. But there's this famous scene in Havana, Cuba where the crime families are meeting. And Al Pacino said, 'I saw a funny thing today. I saw a rebel blow himself up.' And Hyman Roth, one of the financiers, said, 'well so what?' He said, 'so what? The Cuban soldiers get paid to fight. The rebels don't.' And I think that kind of perception tells us something about how well these people fought. The national aspirations they had was something that was totally underestimated.

There's another strange thing about the United States and conflict. We always fight the last war; we're always prepared to fight the last war. When Vietnam came along, you look at a lot of analogies they made to World War II: We will bomb them into submission, we were making all those analogies. And it was a new war for us, a new war all the way around, and it meant a lot of changes, just as we find the conflict in Iraq is the same way.

No one has pointed out the role of the media in both of these conflicts. Those of you in the audience who are of my age and remember that period, the thing you remember is color television. The thing you remember is sitting down and watching the news and watching Vietnam in color. And I think that brought home more than anything else to the American public: you were there, you were right on the battlefield, you saw what was happening, and you obviously were informed and could make an opinion. Those of you who are a little bit older recall that during Korea and during World War II the role of the media was a lot, lot different. Highly censored, there were always happy GI's out there eating on tanks, and yeah they were under a lot of stress but they were happy. And we see the same thing now in the case of Iraq: we're there. Not only are we there on the six o'clock news, we're there on CNN, we're there all the time. So I think the role of the media is something that is an interesting comparison between these two events.

I'm going to stop now because I'm sure that people will have questions and we're getting down to the end of the line. Thank you.

1:07:25.

White: Thank you very much Professor Grundy and Professor McHale. I think we can take about half an hour for questions, discussion and so on now. If you have a question you would like to ask, please come to the microphone to pose it so it can be recorded. I'd like to make a couple of comments. One is, in terms of public opinion there's a great similarity and a great difference that is referred to. One of the similarities: the atmosphere of fear. You mentioned the atmosphere of fear many of us remember; the instructions about, you know, the bomb comes you're supposed to hide under the desk. And the immediacy of that, and that made it easier to rationalize military involvement, and I think 9/11 gave a version of that. But there was also an atmosphere of activism. There was the whole example of the sixties activism and protest, and protest was legitimate and an option and possible in a way that it isn't now.

Another thing that struck me, and please – somebody please come up to that microphone or I'll have to have them argue with each other. Another thing that struck me from Vince's comments was that people on the ground who are closer to a situation will tend to have a different view of it, and I think that's true of the operatives in Iraq, I think that was true of the operatives in the CIA on Vietnam, but of course the people up at the top of the system are going to be paying more attention to the frameworks they're thinking of, containment and so on. And people on the ground are thinking more of what will work, while people at the top are thinking more of, 'how will we get the situation to fit into our framework?' And I think that may explain why you see a little more doubt as you look at the analysts and the people who are closer to the details.

Q: Hi. Professor Herring, you mentioned ethnocentrism and not knowing the history of the locale. Well, I'm Iraqi-American, I just spent six months in Baghdad over the last couple of years, of course I've been an Iraqi all my life and researched and written about it for 15-20 years, so some of the local things that we fail to maybe consider sometimes, is that Saddam was the first ruler since Hitler to take over another country. The first one to invade another country. The first with the exception of the gas chambers to use chemical, biological weapons since the early twenties. And a long array of external aggressions, terrorism, and so on. And that 95, well actually now it's about 99 percent of the people hate the terrorists, the Saddam remnants, who have no platform, have no ideology, but just pure brutal power and just doing the same things they've been doing under Saddam for 35 years. You mentioned when the war started for Vietnamese; for Iraqis the war started with Saddam fighting the war against them. And it's continuing through his followers.

White: And what is the question for Professor Herring?

Q: Following up on what you said about ethnocentrism and ignoring the locale. And also another big element of that is 9/11 and how the Arab world, especially the eastern part of the Arab world, from Egypt to Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia, how this notion of blaming the rest of the world for their problems, their descent from power and prestige, where that comes from, and the consequent result was 9/11.

Herring: I think those of us who opposed going into Iraq at that time, we agreed entirely with what you say, our assessment of that. The question was whether this was the right war at the right time. And there's a huge difference there I think between those who opposed the Vietnam war who tended to single out Ho Chi Minh as – he had his own, he had done his own bad deeds after 1954 but he had the sort of nationalist credentials that was mentioned that nobody else in Vietnam had. So there's no question that there's a fundamental difference there in terms of assessing those two situations.

White: But I would add that in terms of understanding the local culture and so on, first of all not knowing the language, second of all there's lots of reporting on the difficulties of the American troops in figuring out how to negotiate around Iraq. The question of how many Iraqis support the terrorists or how many support Saddam Hussein is not all there is to it; a very large part of the question is do the American troops and other Americans

there know how to negotiate within the country. And in that sense I would say that there is a problem.

Q: Again, that sort of plays into the notion Arabs have of blaming somebody else, and thinking that everybody else controls their lives. It's not about America, it's about Iraqis and about the Arab world. And Iraqis are very much supportive of the process, 11 million went out to vote, they support the government, and Iraqis are taking, they have been taking over and they are taking over.

Herring: They support it but wouldn't you agree that there's also a lot of uneasiness with the American presence there? It's sort of mixed up view like it was in Vietnam I think.

Q: Sure, it's a mixed bag but that's also a product of decades of suspiciousness and paranoia, actually not decades within Iraq but a thousand years of blaming and hatred and resentment and rage...

White: I would like to emphasize that we're going to be discussing Iraq in much greater detail in the other forums, and I'd like to give the next person a chance to ask his question.

Q: I'm another old fogey who was in the army during Vietnam and wasn't sent there. I was also in this room as a student in 1964 and 1965, Fall 1964, when they began the teach-ins. They were on campuses all over the country and they were here. And we heard lectures, basically, from diplomats, ex-diplomats, and academics. And what they were telling us was that the Vietnamese had an ages-long enmity with China, and that the Soviet Union was a long ways away, and the dominoes were not going to fall. And ten years later, after three million, and fifty thousand deaths on one side and the other, the dominoes didn't fall except in Vietnam itself. So I'm expecting in the remainder of this series that you may address whether there's a parallel there or not today. But what I'm really interested in is, and what my question today is, where are the teach-ins? Where are they today? We have some very significant issues. We've been talking about the role of historians, and I like that, I like that philosophy. But right now the issues, the issues of presidential authority and the war itself, there are pros and cons, are right before us. So where are the teach-ins?

White: I should say by the way that on February 9 the Law School is doing a special thing on the legality of the NSA spying, at the Case School of Law. But, Professor Herring and Professor Grundy?

Grundy: Well, first of all I don't think the student body is as engaged in the war nowadays as they were back in Vietnam. Remember now, if you got a bad grade back in the Vietnam era and you became draft bait. And more than one student fetched up in my office pleading for protection from selective service. But that doesn't mean that there isn't interest. We indeed had, if I'm not mistaken, two teach-ins on this campus roughly a year ago or so. And several other programs have been held, not of the teach-in variety.

But the excitement that existed on campuses in the sixties, especially at the time of Kent State, are not at all matched with today's involvement.

McHale: Yeah, one other thing, if you look at the census, that was the baby boom. That was the big bulge, you had so many students and you had a policy, the draft that was falling on specific individuals, and you know, again, what do we have, two thousand plus deaths in Iraq? It was big time; I think it's 50 thousand that's on the wall down in Washington.

Herring: Teach-ins have been held but they've been sporadic and scattered, and what hasn't happened is the next stage of protest on any large scale (unintelligible comment from floor)

White: There's an interesting thing we could speculate about here also, is that in some ways the Iraq war occurred after a substantial debate and a substantial discussion, in a way that the Vietnam war was sort of incremented into, and so not only was there that fact which means that there is sort of in some ways less demand for teach-ins, but I also think the academy is a little less confident of doing teach-ins. Sir.

Q: I'm a person who was one of those tiny avatars of goodness out on the battlefields of South Vietnam in 1967 and 68. And my question really is, how is it in your presentation Professor Herring that you didn't discuss more completely the role of the naval incident in the Gulf of Tonkin that resulted in a resolution in our Congress which led in fact to overwhelming support for that particular National Security Council closure in 1965? How is it that you didn't discuss, for example, those revelations in the LBJ Library that came unclassified in the last couple of years that spoke about the possibility that the naval, the joint command may not have told the truth in bringing forward the reasons why we ought to defend ourselves from a military attack by the North Vietnamese navy. So if you'd be kind enough to address that.

Herring: Well, there are obviously in 30 minutes there are a whole bunch of things I didn't discuss, and I chose to focus more on the actual war itself because I thought that's where the comparisons are going to be made. Yeah, the NSA, National Security Agency revelations last December about Tonkin Gulf confirmed what we had suspected for a long time, well, what we pretty well knew, which is that the second incident, to which Johnson responded actually, never really happened. And what we found out from those revelations is that the people who were sending stuff up the chain deliberately held back evidence that contradicted the idea that there had been an incident, conflicted with the idea that there had been an incident there. So my apologies, I chose in 30 minutes to do what I could.

Grundy: I just might add that I have seen in print the parallel drawn between the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the allegations on the part of the Bush administration that there were weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons in the Saddam Hussein regime, that the two wars were predicated on this parallel of dishonesty.

Q: The even more interesting thing was that these documents were supposed to be released earlier but were held back because it was thought that they would fuel still more skepticism about what's going on today, that's really pulling it together.

White: Professor Moore (Pete Moore, speaker on January 30)

Q: George, I have two quick questions comparing Iraq and Vietnam. The second largest foreign military in Iraq today are the security services, some people call them mercenaries. So my question is, to what extent were mercenaries or paid security services present in Vietnam, in any great numbers? The second question, real quick, is that in Vietnam the United States pursued the Phoenix project, which is a well-known assassination program; the United States is currently using assassination programs today. What was the outcome and effect of those assassination programs in Vietnam?

Herring: Let me touch on the first one first. Actually Senator Fulbright in some hearings, the exact date escapes me, 1971 or '72, used the word "mercenaries" to refer to Australians, New Zealanders and others. The Aussies deeply resented it because they were funded by their own government so there was a huge outcry from Canberra. The New Zealanders the same thing, they got some deals on sheep imports and stuff like that which made it more palatable. I think the case that really applies are the South Koreans, because they got really big subsidies; and in fact what started the economic boom, one of the things that really started the economic boom in South Korea, was the huge amount of funding that went not only to support the army but aid programs and other things that they did a very good job of negotiating with a President who was desperate to get foreign forces in there. Whether it's mercenaries, I guess you could argue about the definitions, but South Korea would have come the closest. The others not so, and the others were very small, the Filipinos had a little ambulance group in there.

White: Just to follow up, my guess is that a lot of the sort of domestic security stuff in Iraq is being done by private security..

Herring: Now that's new.

White: but in the situation where our troops used to do a lot of that...

Herring: Yeah

White: And in some ways it's a way of limiting the number of troops that are publicly involved in Iraq.

Herring: And the number of casualties by having fewer there.

Grundy: Even though they cost three times more per person.

White: Right.

Herring: You're talking about the Phoenix program which is not a particular area of my expertise. There's huge debate among scholars and participants as to whether it was really effective or whether ultimately it was counterproductive. Those who carried it out claim that assassination has been greatly exaggerated, there were a lot of other things going on to [Chu Hoi? Sp?] to lure Viet Cong and others back into the government and I'm hesitant to go further than that with you.

Grundy: This idea of mercenaries really does get me going. It's been estimated that something like one out of five of the forces we're using in Iraq are hired guns, that are men, I assume mostly men, a good many of them for example ex-South African defense force people, ex-Pinochet supporters in Chile. People who have moved around the world, doing their fighting. Now in Vietnam, we occasionally used engineers to maintain the helicopters for example, because the manuals were so complex that the typical draftee couldn't be trusted to maintain a helicopter, but we have these people doing, as Joe points out, military tasks such as guarding government facilities. Such as bodyguards for Iraqi officials and so forth. They are very efficient and very effective, there's no question about it, but they come for something like \$4,000 a week, and we aren't paying our soldiers \$4,000 a week by a long shot. So there's some question as to the way in which the United States is going about this war, that is quite different from past situations.

Q: You had mentioned teaching back during the Vietnam war, and I was wondering what differences you would notice between the students then and now, and if you think it had an effect on how we fight the war and how we view it, or what effect it will have on how we look at it in the future.

Herring: Well, the differences I think are huge, and it's already been mentioned. The fundamental difference was the level of engagement. I started teaching in the Fall of 1965 and I had been in a pretty isolated situation for a couple of years, holed up writing my dissertation, trying desperately to get out of graduate school. And when I hit the Ohio University campus in the Fall of 1965, and one of you mentioned this too, I was not prepared for this as part of my teaching assignment. I knew very little about Vietnam; the first thing, I had to educate myself very quickly, because particularly in the field I taught in I was bombarded with questions from day one. That was one thing and that was exciting and I learned a lot fast, and it spawned an interest that led to my book. I credit the students at Ohio University, if there's any credit for why that book got written it was the interest they sparked in the Fall of 1965 and after.

The other thing of course that's been mentioned and was, the personal stakes were high, and people had to make choices. A story I told this morning was a student, I think around December of '65 in an exam said, "hey, if I don't pass your course I'm going to get sent to Vietnam." Well, that was a level of responsibility I didn't really want to accept; I didn't think I was responsible for it, but it was that sort of thing that made a difference. The draft is part of it, but it's also that generation, it's also the fact that many students had already become engaged in the civil rights movement and the whole thing that's going on; it's a time when everybody is questioning everything, now when we're accepting everything as we tend to do today. So it was a time of ferment, it was a time of

dynamism; it was a time of, cliché, don't trust anybody over thirty; you're questioning your parents, your family; all of this, it's just very different. This is not to demean your generation, you have your own, but it's just to suggest why things were so very different.

White: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

Herring: Indeed.

White: We have about ten minutes, so I'd like to ask each of you to just state your question quickly and see if they can answer it quickly, because there's four people in line and I'd like to get them all in.

Q: My name is Robert and I'd just like to say to the audience and everybody else, America's great and we still have freedom of speech. I'm very glad to be here... what I really want to say is, I lived through that era, and I've seen it, and television was basically black and white, it was Walter Cronkite and it was on every night, the news. And it was big protests on all college campuses across the United States, unless they were so conservative, you know that they didn't do it. But it was a big uproar in this country, just tore it apart. And I can't understand, as I walk across this campus, it's like somebody through pixie dust in their eyes and put them to sleep. There is nothing, there is no discussion, you cannot get a rise out of anybody, it's just unbelievable. One thing I really do admire, I love it, I'm just a neophyte in history, I dabble into this history, I get into books, but it's just like 1984, it's like Bernard, it's new speech, old speech, you know you have to say the right things today, you have to do the right things, and this is totally, totally wrong for America, history is being rewritten. I hate to tell you this, but I see a lot of things that have not been even touched on.

White: I'd like to make a comment on this concern, as part of an answer, which is, another thing we have to remember is, I think it was easier then for people to take the position, just get the heck out. And I think it was easier then to take the position, and people were less sensitive about taking the position, about finding a way to take the position, "the war's bad but the troops are OK." And I think clearly one of the hidden limits on protest has been not wanting to seem to oppose the troops. Because that worked politically for the conservatives so well then and so well now.

Q: Well, America is a warring nation, from its beginning and I mean we love war. And believe me, any time anybody brings up war we're going to get into it, we want to fight, just as you fight on a football field, you want to fight somebody, everybody runs to it.

White: Lets give the next person a chance, thank you...

Q: It's interesting that the people who are resisting the invasion of their country are called insurgents, a word that has negative connotations. This of course is always used by the press, but I was hoping that in the university some people would say something like freedom fighters, as we would say for example if the Soviet Union were there or

Russia. But of course that word is never used, they're insurgents, something that is nefarious...

White: Comment by anybody?

Grundy: I disagree. I don't think insurgents is a loaded word. I think freedom fighters is a loaded word and I think that rebels is a loaded word. But insurgents is to me a fairly neutral term: someone who fights against the established order. I have no problem with that, and I support it in many instances too. You know, when you talk about manipulating language that's not one I would go with. There's plenty of them I would take issue with in regard to this administration, but insurgency is...

White: I did actually choose the word carefully, because there's a sort of technical conversation about that. The point you're making was made in a way by John Stewart, who at one point showed President Bush, saying, "I think the Iraqi people want to fight for their freedom," and Stewart's comment was, "That's what those people think they're doing."

Q: Sounds like Donald Rumsfeld here. I'd like to let people know that on Wednesday evening, the 15th of February, there's going to be a showing of an exceptional documentary on the Winter Soldier hearings, which were held in 1971 in Detroit. A group of veterans of the Vietnam war gathered to give testimony on what they did in Vietnam. It happened right at the time of the My Lai trial of Lieutenant William Calley. So that's at Strosacker on Wednesday evening February 15. I am a veteran of the Vietnam war and I think there are a couple of other parallels that can be drawn. The domino theory is just as alive today as it was then, except the belief is that if we could just establish this domino, if we could make this domino of democracy exist in the middle east, all of our problems will be solved because it's going to spread from country to country. I also would like to say, in Vietnam in regard to the question about mercenaries, the two big construction firms there were a firm called RMK/BRJ and Pacific Architects and Engineers; SeaLand corporation made a ton of money in Vietnam. Now, RMK/BRJ, BR of BRJ is Brown and Root, which today is a subsidiary of Halliburton.

Herring: And contributed lavishly to Johnson's campaigns.

Q: Right. When I was there there was a mistaken notion that the J in the BRJ had to do with Johnson. One final thing, in an effort to make it a multinational effort, not unlike the "coalition of the willing" Lyndon Johnson succeeded in getting the Moroccan government to donate sardines. (laughter)

White: Any comments?

Grundy: Sounds fishy to me.

Q: I was wondering if you could compare, at the time we began to withdraw from Vietnam, the percentage of Congress that was calling for that withdrawal, from currently

the percentage of Congress that's calling for withdrawal from Iraq, and the implications of that.

Herring: By 1973? If you're talking about the actual withdrawal of American military forces, it occurs from January 25, something like that, 1973 to March 31st. Under the peace agreement it's January 25th or 26th – golly, the anniversary is right now, to March. And by that time Congress was on the verge; the Senate several times had passed Cooper-Church amendments cutting off funds for one thing or another or setting deadlines for withdrawal. These were defeated in the House, Nixon was able to keep enough control. But, within, and I don't know what it would be precisely at that time, but by the Summer, I just wrote something on this days ago, but by the Summer, one of the reasons that Nixon agrees to the peace agreement in January is his fear that Congress will come out and declare removal. So I can't give you exact numbers, but it's very close. The support for withdrawal is strong enough in Congress that Nixon and Kissinger are very worried that if they don't take them out, Congress will do it for them.

White: But that's after they've already taken out three quarters of the troops. The other thing to remember is that Nixon started withdrawing troops in 1969. That's what Vietnamization meant. So, relative to the current situation I do think there was more demand for withdrawal in 1969 than there is now, but it was nowhere near the level of support for withdrawal that existed in 1973. Yes sir.

Q: Somebody brought up that the media had a lot to do with it, the war brought to you in living color. With the expansion of many 24-hour news outlets and stuff, is the media being impartial, or are they trying to shape the war depending on their left or right leaning?

White: Anybody want to take that one? George, you can comment on the media in Vietnam, and Vince... the question was, was the media being impartial in reporting on the war in Vietnam and now.

McHale: I just want to say, the media does what it does. It really doesn't attract viewers unless there's something exciting to view. They're looking for a story. It's like, have you ever wondered why there are fires on the news? Who wants to see a fire? Well, fires are exciting, and if you have a story that's kind of bland, it's not going to attract viewers. You're looking for something else. But, having lived through that period as a professor – and I would disagree with somebody who said black and white, because color really came in to vogue throughout this war. And it's one thing to see events in black and white, it's another thing to see them in color; and I think it played a big role in changing the opinions of Americans. That's my view.

Herring: I disagree. I think media tended as much during this time to reflect changing public opinion as to change that opinion. Media was very; and there have been major studies, content analysis of media, as much as we have, there's an archive at Vanderbilt which mercifully saved many of the tapes of the broadcast from that era, from those days; and up until this time I was talking about, this tipping point in Summer or Fall of 1967,

media was either supportive of the war or neutral. It shifts as the country shifts, and I would argue as John Mueller does that it's far less media than it is the casualties, than it is Johnson's request for taxes, than it is this sort of gnawing idea that we're not getting anywhere. Now part of that may come from media, I don't know. There's a larger thing that's tougher to grapple with, and that's what is the impact of three or four images of that war. The monk immolating himself in the Summer of '63. The Tet offensive, Eddie Adams photograph shown on NBC TV, the little girl running down the road during the Tet offensive. How much impact images like that had is almost impossible to measure. But I think media became the scapegoat for American's failure in Vietnam, and that was used very effectively to impose rigid censorship in Grenada, in Panama, in the first Persian Gulf War. And then in the second Gulf War they got very clever with this embedding idea, which as long as the big war lasted worked to a charm, but once that's over then it becomes much more difficult.

White: Although they have going for themselves now the fact that it isn't particularly safe for the media to be out there showing pictures of things anyway. So there is, even though we can talk about CNN, I think there are a lot of images that we're not seeing.

Herring: And keep in mind that in Vietnam this stuff had to go to Hong Kong or to Japan and then to the U.S., it was not live and on scene as you have it now; there's a huge difference.

White: This is of course, as Professor Herring says Professor Mueller will be here next Thursday in this room at this time, and he'd be a good person to ask about that also.

I'd like to thank all of you for coming and participating in the discussion and asking your questions and listening. I'd like to invite you all, if you don't have the full schedule to pick up the flyer that's lying on the table outside. And I'd especially like to thank our panelists for their participation and their wisdom. Thank you all, very, very much.

1:40:16