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THESIS PREPARED FOR LL.M. IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

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DAVID S. DALES, MAJOR, USAF

**ABSTRACT**

This Thesis, *Vietnam and the Gulf War: Lessons Learned in the Utilization of Assets*, was prepared during Advanced Topics in National Security Law: Legal and Policy Issues of the Indo-China War, fall 1997. The paper examined the use of non-hardware assets by the United States military during the last two major wars – Vietnam and the Gulf War. I examined how certain non-hardware assets were utilized during Vietnam. These assets included the will and support of the American people, the American and world media, the American military leadership, the American military reserve forces, and the indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia. The paper takes a critical look at the effectiveness of such utilization; examining both the positive and negative aspects in all categories. Alternative proposals for the failed uses are then proposed for the Vietnam War. Finally, the paper looks to how America learned from our experiences in Vietnam and successfully used the same assets in the Gulf War. The conclusion shows that a major reason for the success of the Coalition forces in the Gulf War was the fact that the lessons from Vietnam were not only learned, they were applied.

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**VIETNAM AND THE GULF WAR:  
LESSONS LEARNED IN THE UTILIZATION OF ASSETS**

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10 December 1997

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Advanced Topics in National Security Law I:  
Legal and Policy Issues of the Indo-China War  
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# **Lessons Learned in the Use of Assets**

David S. Dales

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Despite scores of battles, United States ground troops did not lose a single major battle during the war in Vietnam. Our Navy was the most powerful in the world and our Air Force owned the skies over Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> Be that as it may, Saigon is now called Ho Chi Minh City. How can it be that an enemy leader's name adorns a former South Vietnamese capital when the United States won the battles? Simply put, we won only the military battles. We lost many major battles off of the battlefields. We lost the battle for the will of the people, the will of the press, and the trust of both. The central cause of these losses was President Johnson's failure to completely utilize all assets that were at his disposal. The United States government mobilized tanks, planes, helicopters and men during Vietnam, they did not however, involve the American people, the American media, or correctly utilize all of the assets at their disposal. Because of this failure, President Johnson, in the words of President Richard Nixon, "snatched defeat from the jaws of victory" in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> The United States has learned many lessons from our experience in Vietnam, especially regarding the importance of public opinion, the media and the military. The purpose of this paper is to examine these lessons, how we learned them, and how we later successfully applied these lessons during the Gulf War.

## **II. AMERICAN WILL IN VIETNAM**

The first lesson learned from the Vietnam experience was that the American public must be involved and supportive in order for the United States to be successful. Common sense and military history would dictate that in order for the public to support a military

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<sup>1</sup>Eric M. Bergerund, *The Dynamics of Defeat*, 88, (Westview Press, San Francisco, 1991).

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action, the leader of that nation must be able to explain why the action was being taken. It has been considered a fairly basic principle that American leaders can't wage war without the support of public opinion.<sup>3</sup> Although this is almost childishly simplistic, it eluded our leadership for almost a decade. For the first years of the war, our leaders stated that we were in Vietnam to stop the spread of communism.<sup>4</sup> But how were we to do this? Obviously, it is not enough to place Americans in Vietnam. The question that our leaders should have been able to answer before one American went to Vietnam was not simply why are we going to Vietnam, but more importantly, what are we going to do once we get to Vietnam. Our leaders committed the American name and American blood, but they did not commit the American people.

President Johnson, after inheriting the Vietnam situation from President Kennedy, spoke of the same "halting Communism" tones as his predecessor.<sup>5</sup> Johnson however, did not speak of Vietnam in terms of victory, he spoke in terms of "not losing Vietnam" and of "not yielding to communist aggression."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Johnson was declaring that "American boys won't be sent to do what Asian boys ought to be doing to protect themselves."<sup>7</sup> It seems that Johnson was saying that we weren't going to lose because we weren't going to fight. Johnson did not exhibit his behavior in a vacuum. The fact of the matter is that Johnson never had a plan to win the war.<sup>8</sup> Not getting the public behind the war was not a slip-up on Johnson's part. It was part of his plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 165, (Arbor House, NY, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Nixon at page 79.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 267 (Penguin Books, New York, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Id. at 267.

<sup>6</sup> Clark Dougan, *A Nation Divided*, 46 (Boston Publishing Company, Boston Ma., 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Califano, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, 172, (Simon and Schuster, NY, 1991).

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Johnson intentionally refused to arouse popular sentiment for the war. Indeed, Johnson repeatedly misrepresented to the public the plans for the war and the progress of the war.<sup>9</sup> The reason was that Johnson had a more important project that he had made his top priority.

Johnson saw the war in Vietnam as a direct threat to his programs of social reform – the “Great Society”. Although believing that the war would probably last longer than anyone realized, Johnson understood that if he escalated our involvement in Vietnam, the expenses would more than likely come from his social programs.<sup>10</sup> Johnson felt torn between maintaining his dream of feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, providing quality education, and providing adequate medical care to all Americans on one hand, and preventing the Communists from getting another foothold in Asia on the other.<sup>11</sup>

For several years, Johnson tried to serve both masters, but the social programs were always his top priority. In his State of the Union message Johnson stated, “We will not permit those who fire upon us in Vietnam to win a victory over the desires of the American people. This nation is mighty enough, its society healthy enough, its people strong enough, to pursue our goals in the world while still building a Great Society at home.”<sup>12</sup> In his speech Johnson promised finance, health, social, education, and foreign aid programs, but also promised to provide US troops with “every gun, every dollar, and every decision – whatever the cost.”<sup>13</sup> For a while this worked.

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<sup>8</sup> Nixon at page 79.

<sup>9</sup> H. R. McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*, 194 (Harper Collins Publishing, New York, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter; Presidency of Lyndon Johnson*, 319 (Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 253 (Harper and Row, New York, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Bernstein at 321.

<sup>13</sup> Id. at 322.

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During the first few years of his presidency, Johnson was having excellent luck with his great society programs, pushing through Congress laws not only pertaining to the aforementioned larger issues but also on child nutrition, bail reform, mine safety, truth in packaging, mass transit, national parks and seashores, education, highway safety.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the war had not yet escalated to a point where it over shadowed the Great Society programs. The problem facing the President was what to do about funding the programs and the war. He had seen war kill many of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs and was determined this would not happen to the great Society.<sup>15</sup> In an attempt to square the costs of the war with the costs of social reform, Johnson started to cut much non-Vietnam related defense spending, including selling off billions of dollars worth of strategic materials that the US had stockpiled.<sup>16</sup> Johnson had to try to do all of this as quietly as possible.

Johnson had determined to keep Vietnam out of the press so that it wouldn't overshadow the great society in the minds of the public or the congress.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, he wanted to distance himself from having to make any public decision involving war and peace.<sup>18</sup> The standing rule during the early years of Johnson's administration was that no premature publicity surrounding the war would be tolerated.<sup>19</sup> Johnson had given explicit orders to the military leaders to prevent them from "talking up the war", and had

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<sup>14</sup> Califano at 122

<sup>15</sup> Id. at 52.

<sup>16</sup> Id. at 97.

<sup>17</sup> McMaster at 194

<sup>18</sup> Bernstein at 338

<sup>19</sup> Id. at 347.

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criticized one general for using the word “war” publicly.<sup>20</sup> The Johnson Administration was not entirely sold on this policy of secrecy.

At one point, McGeorge Bundy sent the President a memo recommending that Johnson affirmatively engage the American public. Johnson, however, decided to carry out the war as secretly as possible. Bundy felt that the American people, if given the correct information and the proper guidance, would see the war through to its end.<sup>21</sup> Johnson did not want to risk the social programs but he had no real plan to pull off having the Great Society while fighting a war. When asked point blank if Americans may have to face the decision of “guns or butter”, Johnson answered, “I have not the slightest doubt but whatever it is necessary to face, the American people will face.”<sup>22</sup> It was this type of ambiguity that characterized not only Johnson’s political objectives in Vietnam but also his military planning.

After Johnson made it clear that he didn’t want to “push the war,” his lukewarm attitude toward the war spread like a cancer throughout the Administration’s entire approach to the war in Vietnam. Johnson’s lack of clear political objectives made developing a strategy nearly impossible. At the outset of the war, when Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to develop a program of “graduated overt military pressure” to be used against the North Vietnamese, the JCS responded by asking the President for defined political and military objectives for which they could then determine a course of action.<sup>23</sup> The JCS felt that they had

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Wells, *The War Within*, 22 (Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Bernstein at 345.

<sup>22</sup> Id. at 348.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 45 (Free Press, New York, 1989).



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been given no real guidance on what exactly they were supposed to accomplish in Vietnam. Eventually, the JCS recommended a large dose of swift air strikes at the North Vietnamese. McNamara countered with a proposal for limited “reprisal bombings”. The JCS stated to the President that although these limited bombings may cause the North Vietnamese to halt their insurgencies, they would only be a temporary fix to the problem.<sup>24</sup> Johnson agreed with McNamara, that providing for the possibility of bombing halts would give the North Vietnamese a chance to consider peace and would win the trust of the American people. He hoped that they would see that the Johnson administration was in favor of a peaceful resolution for the war.<sup>25</sup> Again, the lack of a clear objective prevented the Administration from understanding the purpose of their own operations. This uncertainty carried through Johnson’s entire Presidency.

Later in the war, when bombing was stepped up, President Johnson never claimed that this increased bombing was geared toward wining. In his 7 April 1965 speech to John Hopkins University, Johnson spoke of increasing the air strikes against North Vietnam to build the confidence of the South Vietnamese and to ensure their independence.<sup>26</sup> It was simply a strategy aimed at breaking the will of the North Vietnamese and convincing them to stop their aggression. Johnson went to great pains to emphasize that the United States would only use limited and restrained power against the North Vietnamese. Even though the Johnson administration knew as early as 1965 that the North Vietnamese intended to out-wait the United States and wage a war of attrition on the will of the

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<sup>24</sup> Id. at 46.

<sup>25</sup> U. S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat*, 105 (Presido Press, California, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> Steven Cohen, *Vietnam*, 109 (Alfred Knopf Publishing, New Yoirk, 1983).

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American people, Johnson continued with the tentative, almost plodding, bombing strategy.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that this type of warfare may cost the Administration the will of the American people was not lost on the JCS. In a memo to McNamara, in response to his proposal to scale back the bombing, the chiefs stated that a tentative or gradual bombing strategy would cause “the American people to become increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war to a successful conclusion.”<sup>28</sup> The JCS weren’t the only critics of Johnson’s strategy.

In 1964, Senator Barry Goldwater used the Johnson administrations ineffective use of power and lack of coherent strategy for victory in Vietnam as a main platform for his presidential run.<sup>29</sup> Goldwater claimed that a basic requirement for an effective American policy in Vietnam was for the leaders to determine that victory, and nothing less, was our goal.<sup>30</sup> Johnson, in response to criticism, attempted to paint Goldwater as a hawkish man who was bent on war.<sup>31</sup> This is the same time that Johnson was increasing numbers of ground troops into Vietnam. After stepping up the war, Johnson still failed to give the American people a strategy for victory. Maxwell Davenport Taylor, the ambassador to South Vietnam complained that “the US policy had developed into a collection of disparate initiatives lacking any unifying strategic concept or clear objective”<sup>32</sup> The growing list of critics began to include the American public. The American people were

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<sup>27</sup> Id. at 137.

<sup>28</sup> Id. at 142.

<sup>29</sup> McMaster at 108.

<sup>30</sup> Id. at 126.

<sup>31</sup> Id. at 126.

<sup>32</sup> Id. at 276.

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also growing tired of the growing number of casualties without any real plan in sight for winning the war.<sup>33</sup>

President Johnson's refusal to acknowledge the war in any real manner included a refusal to tell the American public the truth with respect to the true role of the American troops.<sup>34</sup> The results of Johnson's policies were very clear, the public was beginning to turn away from Johnson's method of waging war in Vietnam. In November of 1966, a slim majority of Americans polled approved of Johnson's handling of the war. By January 1967 the support had begun to wane, and finally by October 1967 when a majority of Americans felt that sending troops to Vietnam in the first place had been a mistake. Interestingly enough, the same poll showed that a majority of Americans favored increased attacks against the North Vietnamese.<sup>35</sup> In short the Americans had grown weary of fighting a war for stalemate. The majority of Americans polled felt by late 1967 that the war had gone on too long, was too costly, and had yielded no results.<sup>36</sup> The American people were supporting fighting the war to win and nothing less. This did not change Johnson's strategy. He still did not have a strategy to win the war; either public or private. Instead, Johnson simply made the same promises that he had made for the past few years.

The fact that the Johnson administration did not have a clear plan to win the war was consistently obscured by Johnson's promises of light at the end of the tunnel.<sup>37</sup> The Johnson administration, aware of the polls, began sending the message that the war was

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<sup>33</sup> Id. at 280.

<sup>34</sup> Id. at 291.

<sup>35</sup> Dougan 118.

<sup>36</sup> Id. at 119.

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going very well and that the outlook was promising.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately for the Johnson administration, making these pronouncements in late 1967 and early 1968 proved untimely. When North Vietnam launched the Tet offensive 31 January 1968, Americans were shocked to read in their newspapers that this war they had believed to be going well had started to turn the other way. It was so surprising that Walter Cronkite, after reading the wire reports remarked, “what the hell is going on here? I thought we were winning the war”.<sup>39</sup> The total effects of the events of early 1968 on the American public were obvious to Johnson, and will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

On 31 March 1968, only two months after the Tet offensive kicked off, President Johnson announced that he would not seek re-election that year.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly enough, although Johnson had a history of distorting the facts about Vietnam, during this speech he accurately described the events of Tet, something that the press had not done. The ultimate result of Tet was that the American people, tired of the ambiguous policies were no longer willing to trust the administration.<sup>41</sup> Johnson had lost the will of the American people, and with it the ability to successfully fight the war. President Nixon, Johnson’s successor, remarked that “when a president sends American troops to war, a hidden timer starts to run. He has a finite period of time to win the war before people grow weary of it. In February 1968, President Johnson ran out of time.”<sup>42</sup> Johnson could have enlisted the support of the American people. At the outset, he chose not to for fear of competing

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<sup>37</sup> Nixon at 79.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen 193.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Knightly, *Vietnam 1954-1975*, in *The American Experience in Vietnam*, 133 (Grace Sevy ed., 1989).

<sup>40</sup> Cohen at 216.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas McCain, *1000 Hour War*, 38 (Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn, 1994).

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with his social programs. During the later years when he came to the realization that he needed the American people's support, it was too late. This is a lesson that would be taken to heart twenty-two years later.

**III. AMERICAN WILL IN THE GULF WAR**

In 1990, President George Bush was determined not to follow Johnson in making "the greatest political error that this master politician ever made."<sup>43</sup> Ensuring the involvement of the American people was a goal of President Bush's during the very first days of the Gulf war. Bush realized that that the will of the American people was one of the most important tools he had at his disposal. President Bush took an early stand and set very clear goals for our involvement in the Persian Gulf. Unlike President Johnson's ambiguous objectives in Vietnam, President Bush stated his goals at the outset of the war and continued to restate them time and time again. On 26 November 1990, Bush said, "our goals have not changed since I first outlined them to the American people last August. First, the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Second the restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government. Third, security and stability for the Gulf ... And fourth, the protection of American citizens abroad."<sup>44</sup> This plain and simple expression of our goals gave the American people something they never had in Vietnam – a definition of what our military was supposed to accomplish. The firm expression of our goals and objectives sent an obvious message to not only the American

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<sup>42</sup> Nixon at 88.

<sup>43</sup> Nixon at 79.

<sup>44</sup> George Bush, *Why We are in the Gulf*, Newsweek, November 26, 1991 at 29.

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people that we were in the Gulf for a reason, but also to the men and women serving in the gulf.

These stated objectives provided the military with something that they never had in Vietnam...a reason why they were fighting. General Charles Horner, Commander U.S. Ninth Air Force summed it up appropriately when he stated,

I think one of the principal differences between this war and Vietnam is in this war the President gave us clear political goals to achieve – kick the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait, and cripple their nuclear, biological and chemical capabilities. Those goals were militarily achievable. He did not give us goals we could not achieve, like fix Iraq, bring democracy to Baghdad, you just can't do that with military forces. I think that was the major difference between Desert Storm and Vietnam. In Vietnam our goals were less clear and certainly we had things that were not militarily achievable, like bring democracy to South Vietnam, so to speak.<sup>45</sup>

In short, the military was told what was expected of them, clearly and directly by the President. President Bush, by setting these clear goals and objectives, took the first step toward ridding America of what had become known as the “Vietnam Syndrome”. Just as President Johnson intentionally kept the American people out of Vietnam, President Bush made an effort to include the public. Bush vowed to the American people that the Gulf war would never become another Vietnam. Bush stated, “I have told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat it tonight. Our troops

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Horner, *Frontline Interview*, WGBH Educational Foundation, 9 January 1996.

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will have the best possible support in the entire world and they will not be asked to fight with one hand behind their back.”<sup>46</sup> By taking the specter of Vietnam head on, Bush avoided another one of Johnson’s often made mistakes – not being honest with the American people. <sup>47</sup> Bush had learned from our experience in Vietnam that you don’t have to tell the American people everything, but what you do tell them had better be true. Bush took the approach that he would set an immediate goal of getting Iraq out of Kuwait; he would state it early and he would stick to this with no hidden agendas. This early statement of objective went a long way toward swaying not only the public opinion but the will of the US military as well. A veteran of Vietnam, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf stated “President Bush launched into a fiery speech calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraq... I thought that this did not sound like a leader bent on compromise... I was swept by his words in spite of myself. I was inspired to hear the president of the United States speak of making a stand.”<sup>48</sup> Again, this was something that General Schwarzkopf didn’t get from his Commander-in-Chief during Vietnam. Not only did President Bush set our objectives, he also let the Iraqis know that there would be no room for ambiguity. More importantly he let the American people know that there would be no room for compromise. The president even surprised those who knew him best when he remarked that if Saddam Hussein gets into an armed situation with the coalition, “he is going to get his ass kicked.”<sup>49</sup> Colleagues remarked

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<sup>46</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media*, 3 (Manchester University Press, New York, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> McMaster at 195.

<sup>48</sup> H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, 366 (Bantam Books, New York, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Myron Praeger, *Saddam Hussein’s Gulf War*, 76 (Westport Press, 1992).

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that they had never seen George Bush so focussed or more resolute than he was from August 1990 through February 1991.<sup>50</sup>

This resolve was not a momentary disguise. From the outset, Bush was adamant that Hussein must pull out of Kuwait or there was nothing to negotiate.<sup>51</sup> Although this tactic has been criticized by those who saw it as Bush simply aching to get into a war for his own political purposes,<sup>52</sup> it is far more likely that Bush was applying the lesson he had learned from Johnson's failure to make a plan and stick to it. This clear objective made it much easier to develop a strategy. In this case the military knew what was expected of them, to defeat the Iraqis and drive them from Kuwait. This was a much easier task than trying to decipher and bring about the ends of some ambiguous political message. The message carried through the military and to the American people.

The numbers bear out the differences between Johnson and Bush's respective approaches to war. In January 1991, an overwhelming number of Americans who were polled felt that President Bush did a good job of explaining why the United States was in the Persian Gulf.<sup>53</sup> The 82% was up dramatically from the 74% who felt that Bush was doing a fair to excellent job of explaining why we were in the Gulf in November 1990.<sup>54</sup> It is important to remember that November 1990 was in the midst of an almost five month build up/waiting period for United States forces. During this November period, Bush's approval rating was positive. Most of those polled who were not in favor of Bush's policies were of the opinion that he was moving too slowly – that no action was

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<sup>50</sup> Alan Geyer, *Lines in the Sand*, 84 (Westminster/Know Press, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> Roger Hilsman, *George Bush vs. Saddam Hussein*, 77 (Lyford Books, New York, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Graubard, *Mr. Bush's War*, 122 (Hill and Wang, New York, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, 201 (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1994).



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unacceptable.<sup>55</sup> The American people clearly did not want a replay of Johnson's ambiguous, plodding Vietnam strategy.

The fact that President Bush had set clear objectives and stuck with these objectives had a direct effect upon the American public. In contrast to the Vietnam era questions of why we were there, most Americans felt they had a pretty good understanding of what the President was doing. Almost 75% of Americans polled said they had a "clear idea" of why American troops were in the Gulf.<sup>56</sup> Having three quarters of the population understanding the issues that brought us to war contrasted dramatically with the numbers from Vietnam. In 1967, only 48% of those Americans polled felt that they understood what United States troops were fighting for in Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly enough, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, only 53% of polled Americans understood why we were at war.<sup>58</sup> What were the ultimate effects of having a population that understands the objectives of a war? Quite simply it translates into support. Bush's approval ratings were outstanding throughout the war, even with the dip in support during the build up. The longer the wait, the higher the percentage of Americans who wanted Bush to take action quickly and get Hussein out of Kuwait.<sup>59</sup> The American people knew why the President had ordered our troops into the Gulf and wanted him to get on with meeting his objectives. Even those Americans who were against the war were supportive of the troops who were fighting the war. This was due to perception that the American people

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<sup>54</sup> Id. at Mueller at 200.

<sup>55</sup> Id. at 26.

<sup>56</sup> Id. at 28.

<sup>57</sup> Id. at 28.

<sup>58</sup> Id. at 28.

<sup>59</sup> Id. at 231.

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never were behind the troops in Vietnam and that led to our eventual defeat.<sup>60</sup>

Understanding the policies alone does not explain the support.

In addition to understanding why we were at war, Bush received support for his policies because a majority of Americans trusted him and his advisors. In fact, almost 70% of those polled stated that they trusted Bush et al, on the issue of going to war.<sup>61</sup> This was not blind faith, at the same time, only 30% approved of the way Bush was dealing with the economy and his report card is even worse in terms of the savings and loan crisis and the federal budget deficit.<sup>62</sup> The American people largely saw Bush as a President with a sense of drive and a determination on the Gulf War issues, which led the public to follow his belief in the importance of accomplishing his objectives.<sup>63</sup> President Bush had learned that the American public must be supportive of a war in order for the United States military to be successful. In order to be supportive, the public must understand the issues and our objectives in the war. Finally, Bush learned that the American public must trust the president and the military leaders to be conscientious and serious about meeting the stated objectives. While Johnson did none of these things; Bush was successful by doing all of them. The American public was not, however, the only asset misused by President Johnson; he also failed to properly utilize the media.

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<sup>60</sup> Hilsman at 111.

<sup>61</sup> Mueller at 193.

<sup>62</sup> Id. at 188.

<sup>63</sup> Id. at 58.

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**IV. IMPACT OF THE MEDIA IN VIETNAM**

The media is another of the assets that an American president has at his disposal in time of war. It has been said that the media lost the war in Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> In fact, Richard Nixon believed that "those who covered the war so distorted the truth that it became impossible for Americans to figure out what was happening."<sup>65</sup> Although these statements give the press much more credit and power than they deserve, it must be said that the media did have a great impact on the American public during Vietnam. Most of the criticism of the press stems from the coverage of the Tet Offensive of early 1968. However, to accurately review Johnson's misuse of the media, we must first examine the situation that Johnson inherited from President Kennedy.

The Kennedy administration made a concerted effort to be evasive with the press concerning Vietnam. The details were slow to come out of the White House and when they did, they were often misleading.<sup>66</sup> This stems, in part, from Kennedy's uncertainty on what path to take in Vietnam; to remain in country or to pull the American troops from Vietnam after the next election. Kennedy may not have wanted to stir up the American people for nothing, because as some suspect, he intended to pull the United States out of Vietnam as soon as he was reelected.<sup>67</sup> This may have driven Kennedy to try to keep the press out of Vietnam; or he may have not wanted to create an issue during the election. Whatever the motivation, President Kennedy had been fairly successful in keeping the press out of the military areas in Vietnam, such as the Bien Hoa airbase from which

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Elegant, *How to Lose a War*, in *The American Experience* (Grace Sevy ed. 1989) at 139.

<sup>65</sup> Nixon at 15.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 20 (Oxford University Press, New York, 1986).

<sup>67</sup> McMaster at 40.

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America was staging air missions.<sup>68</sup> Kennedy's efforts at secrecy were at the time of otherwise positive media coverage. It wasn't simply access that Kennedy was trying to restrict, it was also the truth. Kennedy's comments to the press regarding Vietnam were to set the stage for Johnson's doomed policies. Kennedy had not taken steps to acknowledge a war in Vietnam, in fact, he had denied that American troops were actually fighting in Vietnam.<sup>69</sup> The Pentagon media often joked that there were more American soldiers in Saigon bars than Kennedy admitted to having in all of Vietnam.<sup>70</sup> This policy reached farther than just the media, it also effected the development of an Administration media policy.

As Johnson soon discovered, it is difficult to develop a policy regarding the release of information to the press when you are denying that there is a war. For Kennedy's purposes, the less the press knew about Vietnam the better. During 1962-1963, most of the information coming out of Vietnam came from or through public affairs offices or other government sources.<sup>71</sup> Obviously the slant to these stories was generally pro-administration. The Kennedy Administration was using the press to send positive messages to the American people. The only real news coming out of Vietnam was the news that Kennedy wanted the American public to hear. Additionally, due to the Kennedy restrictions on the information coming out of Vietnam, there was not a great deal of public interest in the country. This changed somewhat in the later months of Kennedy's presidency.

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<sup>68</sup> Hallin at 21.

<sup>69</sup> Id. at 26.

<sup>70</sup> Califano at 173.

<sup>71</sup> Hallin at 40.

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In the last days of summer of 1963, Buddhist leaders began to clash with President Diem. The Buddhists had a fairly elaborate public relations organization churning out press releases, news bulletins, and contacting American media members.<sup>72</sup> When American newspapers carried photos of a Buddhist monk lighting himself on fire to protest Diem, the lid was coming off the press a little. When Johnson inherited the Presidency, he also inherited was a widening credibility gap.<sup>73</sup> Like Kennedy, Johnson also attempted to keep the press away from the war in Vietnam. Unlike Kennedy, he wasn't doing this because he planned a pullout of troops, as stated earlier, he did it to protect his social programs. However, with more and more American troops going to Vietnam, the number of reporters increased, as did public interest. At the outset, there were only a handful of correspondents in Vietnam, but by the mid-1960s there were almost 700 correspondents in and around Vietnam.<sup>74</sup> Even though the numbers of troops were escalating, Johnson tried to convince the American public that our role had not changed. This was even though the opposite was true, however, with the greater number of reporters in country, it was growing difficult to hide the change. The seeds of dishonesty planted by Johnson, and Kennedy earlier, would end up turning the coverage from positive to negative. The positive treatment by the press during the early years of the war was attributable, in part, to the fact that a large number of the media members were from the school of thought that gave deference to the president.<sup>75</sup> If the President said that there was no change in our role, the thought went, then there had been no

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<sup>72</sup> Karnow at 296.

<sup>73</sup> Califano 176.

<sup>74</sup> Hallin at 126.

<sup>75</sup> Id. at 63.

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change. The realization that the president may have been less than honest with the press began a trend toward questioning the overall Vietnam policies of the Johnson Administration.<sup>76</sup>

Faced with the possibility of growing dissatisfaction with his policies, Johnson did nothing to combat the trend. Johnson failed to take into consideration a new facet of news reporting – television. Television gave the American public something they had never had before, war in their living rooms. Americans were provided for the first time an uncensored look at the war.<sup>77</sup> Television, like the print media, began as supportive of Johnson's policies, but began to turn anti-war in Johnson's later years.<sup>78</sup> What did Johnson do to turn the media against him? The most accurate answer is he did nothing. As will be discussed later, Johnson's sins were largely sins of omission.

With the growing numbers of reporters, Johnson was faced with a decision of how to deal with the media. President Johnson had the opportunity to control or limit coverage of the war, at least the direct field coverage. He chose not to restrict media access. Johnson had the ability to shut the media out of Vietnam entirely. The South Vietnamese government was willing to restrict access to their country to exclude the press, however, President Johnson decided to not control the press.<sup>79</sup> There were short-lived restrictions on where the media could access, a hangover from the Kennedy Administration; but President Johnson decided to not enforce possible requirements on approval of stories.

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<sup>76</sup> Id. at 83.

<sup>77</sup> Id. at 114.

<sup>78</sup> Id. at 110.

<sup>79</sup> Clarence Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 160 (Norton and Company, New York, 1993).

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He also chose to allow almost unrestricted access to the war.<sup>80</sup> Although the typical restrictions on the release of information applied during Vietnam, the journalists were still allowed to accompany the troops into the field and bring back pictures, videotape, and commentary for the American people.<sup>81</sup> The images of the dead and wounded were coming into America at the same time the media was taking an anti-war swing. The stories critical of the war were different from what America had experienced in the past.<sup>82</sup> The lack of restrictions on the press allowed not only critical, anti-Administration stories, but also allowed for erroneous and sometimes staged stories.<sup>83</sup> One example, first and foremost, shows the effects of Johnson's not adequately utilizing the press during the war. This example is, of course, the Tet offensive.

In 1966 and early 1967, Johnson was facing more and more open opposition to the war.<sup>84</sup> To combat this, Johnson began a campaign, for the first time, to send out the message that the war was progressing well. In fact, during 1967 and 1968, the American media was filled with positive messages from the White House about the course of the war. General Westmoreland had returned to the United States at the request of Johnson to make re-assuring speeches to the American people. He spoke confidently about the progress being made in Vietnam. We were on our way to victory it appeared. During an address to a joint session of Congress in May 1967, Westmoreland spoke positively about the war and warned the American people that the North Vietnamese "can win politically

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<sup>80</sup> Id. at 122.

<sup>81</sup> Id. at 129.

<sup>82</sup> Hallin at 139.

<sup>83</sup> Elegant at 141.

<sup>84</sup> Wells at 84.

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what they can't win militarily.”<sup>85</sup> Citing “signs of enemy success in the world arena which they cannot match on the battlefield,” Westmoreland was clearly stating that dissent by Americans was aiding the North Vietnamese cause and prolonging the war.<sup>86</sup> In less than a year, Westmoreland would see these words come to life in a very literal fashion.

After nearly a year of positive messages from the White House, the nation was shocked when the North Vietnamese launched a massive offensive during the final days of January 1968.<sup>87</sup> This offense was clearly routed by the United States/South Vietnamese military.<sup>88</sup> That is not, however, what the American people heard about the Tet offensive. The reports that came in were almost uniformly inaccurate.<sup>89</sup> The reports ranged from the South Vietnamese government falling to the American embassy being overrun to reports that the North Vietnamese had achieved a total military victory.<sup>90</sup> What caused these obviously inaccurate reports? There is no one answer. The fact is that there was a combination of causes. The first was sheer surprise. As stated earlier, in the months preceding Tet, the White House and the military had been nothing but positive about the war. The next thing the media knew there were Vietcong in the embassy grounds. The nation could only believe that something terrible must have happened. The news was characterizing Tet as a humiliating defense for America and sent to the public

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<sup>85</sup> Edward Kosner, *The Home-front War*, Newsweek, 8 May 1967, at 32

<sup>86</sup> *Id.* at 33.

<sup>87</sup> Dougan at 126.

<sup>88</sup> *Id.* at 127.

<sup>89</sup> *Id.* at 128.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* at 127.



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the message that prior reports of progress should be doubted.<sup>91</sup> In short, the message was that Johnson had lied to the American people. In addition to surprise, the fog and confusion that are inherent in combat situations certainly caused some of the inaccurate reports. This military failure of the North Vietnamese was turning out to be the very thing that General Westmoreland had feared most, a political victory for the North Vietnamese.

Faced with the erroneous news reports, Johnson had to make a decision on how to attack these reports and win back the American people. On 2 February 1968 President Johnson addressed the press on the Tet issue. Forty-eight hours had passed and all the American people had heard were the erroneous reports. Now was the time the American people needed a pep talk. They needed to hear from the president that he had been telling the truth about the war for the past few months. During his address, Johnson, looking weary and uncomfortable, did not deliver.<sup>92</sup> The President made general, almost half-hearted comments about the offensive. Instead of saying that we had defeated the North Vietnamese, Johnson told the American people that “the stated purposes of the general uprising have failed.”<sup>93</sup> Even when asked point blank by reporters if we were winning the war, Johnson proved evasive. Instead of answering the question, Johnson told the reporter and the American people that he would have to wait and see how the offensive came out in the end.<sup>94</sup> Although a President should make as informed as decision as possible, this was not the time for Johnson to be coy with the American people. Taken in context, Johnson’s words could only serve to fuel the fires of doubt. When asked if

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<sup>91</sup> Wyatt at 187.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*, 127(Presidio Press, Novato, Ca. 1977, abridged 1994).

<sup>93</sup> Kathleen Turner, *Lyndon Johnson’s Dual War*, 221(University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Il., 1985).

<sup>94</sup> Braestrup at 127.

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America were winning the war, any answer other than a resounding “yes” would have sounded to America like a “no”. Once again, the Administration was not unified behind Johnson’s tactics.

President Johnson was also urged by his advisers to meet with the press, and more importantly the American people, to explain the truth behind both the Tet offensive and the course of the war.<sup>95</sup> Johnson was reluctant to do this opting instead to order General Westmoreland to make brief daily personal statements. These statements were intended to convey to the American people Westmoreland’s confidence in our troops.<sup>96</sup> Johnson had placed the responsibility of reclaiming the faith of the American people at the feet of the man who had been proclaiming imminent victory for the past year. The reluctance of Johnson to make a personal appearance of the issue of Tet merely reinforced the belief that all was lost.<sup>97</sup> It was almost two months before Johnson once again spoke to the American people. For two months, America did not have their leader to reassure them. They were left with the initial erroneous reports and the later reports from those few media members who felt inclined to inform the public of their errors.<sup>98</sup> The only input from Johnson was couched in ambiguity. Although members of the Administration were attempting to repair damage to public opinion, the public was left with a choice, they could trust what they have heard from the media for two months or they could trust the Administration that had been sending conflicting messages for years. Instead of setting the record straight, Johnson left the American people with a different picture of the war in

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<sup>95</sup> Turner at 219.

<sup>96</sup> Id. at 220.

<sup>97</sup> Id. at 123.

<sup>98</sup> Braestrup at 43.

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Vietnam. This picture was of the embassy falling, the American dead and wounded at Khe Sanh and of General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Chief of National Police, putting a pistol to the head of a captured Vietcong and pulling the trigger.<sup>99</sup> These images did nothing to aid in the public opinion battle that was facing Johnson. Without a clear view from the White House of what had occurred, many reporters, especially television reporters and newsmen, designed their own version of the events opting for versions that gave the people the most dramatic and controversial picture of what had happened.<sup>100</sup> Those close to the president knew that the criticism hurt him, but he rarely spoke of it even privately.<sup>101</sup> What he did say that bothered him was that the press, especially the liberal press, had glorified Ho Chi Mihn.<sup>102</sup> More and more, Johnson was faced with Pro-Ho signs at protests. Johnson remarked, “no body ever says anything bad about Ho Chi Mihn. They call me a murderer, but Ho still has a great image.”<sup>103</sup> This was another error of omission on Johnson’s part.

President Johnson never made an attempted to educate the public about the enemy. More specifically, he never attempted to vilify the enemy. Perhaps this stems from his inability to see the North Vietnamese as an enemy in a military sense rather than just another political opponent. Whatever the reason, Johnson left the liberal media’s claims regarding Ho’s virtue largely intact.<sup>104</sup> Again, Johnson chose not to fight. When Johnson

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<sup>99</sup> Wyatt at 106.

<sup>100</sup> Braestrup at 11.

<sup>101</sup> Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 139, (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Id. at 138.

<sup>103</sup> Id. 139.

<sup>104</sup> John R. MacArthur, *Second Front*, 129, (Hill and Wang, NY, 1992).

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did, finally, address the American public regarding Tet, it was not to bring a message of victory.

On 31 March 1968, President Johnson spoke to the people. The president did not reaffirm the abilities of the American troops. He did not let the people know that victory in the war was within reach. In fact, Johnson did not even attempt to rally the people around the flag. What he did do was make concessions of defeat, if not in word in deed. Johnson began by restating the same ambiguous statements of results from Tet.<sup>105</sup> He spoke of the North Vietnamese not producing general uprising and of the North Vietnamese being unable to control the cities they attacked.<sup>106</sup> He, once again, did not speak of defeating the North Vietnamese. Instead Johnson, who had used our bombing as an attempt to force the North Vietnamese to stop aggression, now rewarded the aggression by halting the bombing north of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel. Additionally, Johnson announced a plan for the reduction of United States troops in Vietnam.<sup>107</sup> He did go on at length about a “Vietnamization” of the war. Johnson ended on another note of defeat. He announced that he would not be seeking reelection.<sup>108</sup> When one considers this speech in context it was nothing more than a concession speech. A “Dear John” letter to the South Vietnamese if you will. The message was very clear. Tet wasn’t as bad as people thought, but I’m getting our boys out soon and ending the bombing now because we really don’t want to fight with North Vietnam anymore. Had Johnson spoken out earlier with a positive message his presidency could possibly have ended on a positive

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<sup>105</sup> Willaim Williams, *America in Vietnam*, 274 (Anchor Press, New York, 1985).

<sup>106</sup> Merle Miller, *Lyndon*, 512 (Putnam, New York, 1980).

<sup>107</sup> *Id.* at 512.

<sup>108</sup> *Id.* at 513.

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note. Because of his inaction however, Johnson was stuck with the erroneous messages that the media delivered. Once again, Johnson's actions confirmed the inaccurate messages being sent by the media; that we were losing the war. The ultimate result of Tet was that Johnson had decided not to run, and his advisors, including McNamara, had started to believe that America could not win the war.<sup>109</sup>

Johnson's failure to respond to the erroneous stories wasn't the only inactivity that hurt him. Earlier, it was stated that the Tet offensive had taken America by surprise. It did not surprise everyone. Johnson and his Administration were aware of an early spring North Vietnamese offensive for several months prior to Tet.<sup>110</sup> After once again being advised of the benefits of warning the public of a possible spring offensive, Johnson once chose his favorite other path – he did nothing.<sup>111</sup> Although announcing the possibility of an offensive may not have struck any chords with the general population, it certainly would have prevented the shock and surprise of Tet. Additionally, the press, both in Vietnam and at home, would have been better able to respond to the attacks and could have delivered more accurate reports.

President Johnson's strategy of dealing with the press was much like his military strategy; void of any aggression. Johnson simply responded to the events rather than taking aggressive action. Had our President gone to the public prior to the Tet offensive things may have worked out differently. Had our president gone to the media and forcefully explained what really happened at Tet things may have worked out differently. Had our president set firm guidelines in controlling the media in Vietnam, things may

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<sup>109</sup> Paul Elliott, *Vietnam*, 145 (Arms and Armour, London, 1996).

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have worked out differently. As it was played out, the absolutely uncontrolled media reported a war into the American homes largely without comment from the American President. Johnson never really had a public affairs program to inform the American people of its side in any major policy question regarding Vietnam.<sup>112</sup> The media did not lose the war in Vietnam, Johnson lost the media. His inaction cost the trust of the media then their support. Even previously staunch supporters like Walter Cronkite became extremely critical of the Johnson Administration following Tet.<sup>113</sup> This support would never return to the White House during the war years.

Looking no farther than the “Christmas Bombings” of 1972, one can see the lasting effects that Tet had on the relationship between the White House and the media. The Paris peace talks had progressed to where, in fall 1972, it appeared that an agreement was within sight.<sup>114</sup> In December 1972, Hanoi hardened their position on several key issues. This brought the talks to yet another stalemate. To encourage the North Vietnamese to negotiate seriously, President Nixon ordered a renewed bombing campaign on Hanoi and Haiphong and the mining of Haiphong harbor.<sup>115</sup> The bombing lasted for eleven days. The mining and the bombing, especially the latter, achieved the stated goals in timely fashion. The talks resumed on January 8, 1973, and a signed cease-fire agreement was issued on January 27, 1973.<sup>116</sup> Nixon accomplished in a matter of days what Johnson’s

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<sup>110</sup> Miller at 499.

<sup>111</sup> Miller at 500.

<sup>112</sup> Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy II* 17 (Presidio Press, Novato, Ca., 1992).

<sup>113</sup> Elliott at 144.

<sup>114</sup> Nixon at 154.

<sup>115</sup> Id. at 154.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Herz, *Prestige Press and the Christmas Bombing of 1972*, 6 (Ethics Public Policy Center, Washington D. C., 1980).

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bombing couldn't accomplish in almost four years. One would think that that the American public would celebrate this accomplishment and hold Nixon up as a hero and a peacemaker. Unfortunately, it didn't happen this way. This otherwise successful campaign did not enjoy the positive reaction it deserved.

The American media did not see or report the bombing as bringing peace. In fact a great deal of the press was extremely critical from the outset of the bombing. The day after the bombing started, the *New York Times* opined that the bombing was highly unlikely to bring about any kind of peace, but would instead prolong the war.<sup>117</sup> They even argued that Henry Kissinger had lied to the American people in fall of 1972 when he stated that peace was at hand.<sup>118</sup> The media referred to the bombing as "a Christmas of horrors occurring at a time to forgive, but unfortunately only saints can forgive mass murder".<sup>119</sup> The bombing was seen as terrorism and the uncivilized murder of a small Asian nation.<sup>120</sup> Nixon came under personal attack for ordering the bombing. He was characterized as a tyrant, a lunatic and a mass murderer in print.<sup>121</sup> The press not only attacked the simple fact that the bombing was occurring, they also attacked the manner of the bombing.

The media claimed that Nixon was using B-52s to carpet bomb Hanoi and Haiphong, and that tens of thousands of civilians had been slaughtered.<sup>122</sup> The bombings, according

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<sup>117</sup> Herz at 45.

<sup>118</sup> Id. at 45.

<sup>119</sup> Wells at 562.

<sup>120</sup> Herz at 47.

<sup>121</sup> Nixon at 157.

<sup>122</sup> Herz at 47.

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to the press, had targeted schools, residential areas, and hospitals.<sup>123</sup> The *Washington Post* also claimed that the Administration was deceiving the American people regarding the scope of the bombing, pushing the idea that Hanoi had been carpet-bombed.<sup>124</sup> The claims that that the United States had carpet-bombed Hanoi on Christmas day was inaccurate on both counts. First, there was no bombing on Christmas day. Second, and more importantly, B-52s did not carpet bomb Hanoi or Haiphong. The B-52s were used mainly to strike area targets on the outskirts of the cities.<sup>125</sup> That is not to say that civilians in Hanoi and Haiphong were not killed during the bombings. These deaths, however, were nowhere near the scope as reported by the press. The tens of thousands of civilians butchered by the bombing turned out to be between 1,300 and 1,500.<sup>126</sup> This is the figure as claimed by the North Vietnamese government, an entity that had every incentive to increase the totals for propaganda purposes. As it turned out, the North Vietnamese did not have to use the figures for propaganda, the American media did the job for them as well as it could have been done.

Despite the positive outcome of the bombing, the over all news coverage was overwhelmingly negative. The numbers speak for themselves. CBS News and *Newsweek* carried six times more negative coverage of the bombing than positive coverage. Time and the *New York Times* carried twenty times more negative than positive coverage. Finally, the *Washington Post* carried twenty-five time more negative

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<sup>123</sup> Id. at 49.

<sup>124</sup> Id. at 50.

<sup>125</sup> Id. at 55.

<sup>126</sup> Nixon at 158.



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stories about the bombing than positive stories.<sup>127</sup> This unbalanced reporting shows how obviously the media ignored any positive aspect of the bombing. The previous positive coverage enjoyed by the White House had never returned after Tet. The White House had never regained the trust of the press. In fact, it appears that the press was more inclined to follow the leads provided by anti-war activists in the United States and even the government in Hanoi than their own president.<sup>128</sup> The reports on the Christmas bombing were replete with comments by anti-war activists with little or no real knowledge of the war.<sup>129</sup>

One example of this was the series of stories citing the experiences of singer Joan Baez who told of walking through the demolished neighborhoods and streets of Hanoi smelling the burnt flesh of civilians and seeing the dead civilians.<sup>130</sup> The reporting on the Christmas bombing was negative, inaccurate and intentional. Common sense would dictate that given the availability of positive facts, a twenty-five to one ratio of negative to positive reports can only be attributed to the media intentionally ignoring the positive. The relationship between the press and President had turned 180 degrees. Instead of the granting deference to the White House, the press distrusted the White House. This change can be attributed to the approach taken by Johnson in dealing with the press. Once he lost the trust of the press, the Vietnam War could never receive fair or positive coverage.

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<sup>127</sup> Herz at 65.

<sup>128</sup> Id. at 65.

<sup>129</sup> Id. at 66.

<sup>130</sup> Wells at 559.

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**V. IMPACT OF THE MEDIA IN THE GULF WAR**

The failure of President Johnson to properly consider the media as an asset in war was a lesson taken to heart by President Bush early in his tenure as Vice President. Under President Reagan, Bush saw how effective the press was controlled during military operations in Grenada and Panama, not to mention during Britain's military operation in the Falklands. In all of these cases, the press had been kept well away from the military, and the operations had been fairly successful.<sup>131</sup> After the Falklands War, Lt.

Commander Arthur Humphries, United States Navy Public Affairs specialist saw what he believed to be a truly superior way to manage the press during a time of war. Humphries was strongly in favor of "controlling access to the fighting, invoking some censorship, and rallying aid in the form of patriotism at home and in the battle zone."<sup>132</sup> Humphries believed that Great Britain had done an outstanding job of controlling the media in the Falklands, but that they did not go far enough. To perfect the system, Humphries argued, the government must provide pictures of the war for the public. The public could not be placed in a position where they receive no news, that according to Humphries, would be simply censorship, something the American public could never allow.<sup>133</sup> The United States tested this theory in Grenada and in Panama and found it to their liking. The Bush administration took this approach and used it masterfully during the Gulf War.<sup>134</sup> The strategy was to strictly control access to the war, provide information to a group or pool

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<sup>131</sup> Taylor at 5.

<sup>132</sup> MacArthur at 140.

<sup>133</sup> Id. at 141.

<sup>134</sup> Id. at 140.

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of reporters so that the same stories would come from public affairs and be distributed to everyone.

Almost immediately in the Gulf War, Bush took control of the media. He didn't let the media make their own rules as Johnson had done in Vietnam. Additionally, he began a strategy of publicly vilifying Saddam Hussein.<sup>135</sup> Unlike Johnson, no one had to guess what Bush's feelings were toward his enemy counterpart. At the outset, Bush began referring to Hussein as the newest Adolph Hitler. During his first speech after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Bush even utilized World War II type verbiage to emphasize his point. Instead of Iraq attacking, they "stormed in blitzkrieg fashion through Kuwait."<sup>136</sup> Bush wasted no opportunity in vilifying Hussein. At every turn, Bush would refer to Hussein as a butcher, a liar, or another Hitler.<sup>137</sup> In this manner, Bush made sure that Hussein could not get his foot in the media's door. After all, what paper would want to be seen as the mouthpiece for the new Hitler? Bush had successfully used the lessons learned in placing the United States in a position of the protector of international justice and world peace while Iraq was shown as an enemy of peace and democracy whose leader was a butcher and was calling for the raping of Kuwait.<sup>138</sup> While Johnson did nothing about Ho Chi Mihn's position in the press, except complain, Bush would attempt a preemptive strike at Hussein's reputation. A clear example of Bush's tactic is when, within weeks of the invasion, Hussein announced that all 3000 Americans who were in Kuwait or Iraq would not be allowed to leave. Bush immediately strongly-condemned

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<sup>135</sup> Taylor at 5.

<sup>136</sup> Graubard at 11.

<sup>137</sup> Schwarzkopf at 438.

<sup>138</sup> Taylor at 5.

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this as an act of barbarism. Bush had now given Americans a real stake in the war, Americans were being held buy this new Hitler.<sup>139</sup> Despite Hussein's claim that these hostages were 'guests', Bush's preemptive media strike precluded any positive public opinion for Iraq.<sup>140</sup> In fact, in light of how he had been characterized by Bush in the press, Hussein's protests simply made him look ridiculous. Bush had effectively utilized the press to paint Hussein in the worst possible light; something Johnson had not done to Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. Bush avoided another of Johnson's media mistakes by establishing extremely effective restrictions on the press.

Once the war began, the U.S. military, in cooperation with the Saudi government, enacted a media policy to control not only access to the military, but also to control the media output. The Saudis were not only willing to restrict the press, they had in fact wanted to force all reporters from the country during August 1990. It was only with United States military intervention that the Saudis decided to allow reporters to remain in country.<sup>141</sup> The restriction imposed included:

1. Media members must belong to press pools to be eligible for military coverage.
2. Press pools were always accompanied by military escort officers
3. The military decided when and where the pools were allowed to go
4. No soldier or officer could be interviewed without escort officer and commander approval
5. All news copy had to be submitted in advance of transmittal to the military for security review
6. Reporters were not allowed to live with the military units, but instead were rotated in and out with escorts on a daily basis
7. Any reporter who went outside of the pools would be detained and returned to the rear. They could also have their credentials lifted and be returned to the United States

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<sup>139</sup> Graubard at 110.

<sup>140</sup> Taylor at 6.

<sup>141</sup> Schwarzkopf at 399.

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8. Any violation of the rules was punishable by expulsion from the theater of operations<sup>142</sup>

Limitations on the descriptions of losses and casualties were also in effect. Casualty assessments had to be made in terms of 'light, moderate or heavy'. This was to prevent any use by Iraq in both tactical and propaganda terms.<sup>143</sup> Bush and his top advisers were determined from the very start of the war not to fall into the same trap that Johnson did in Vietnam. Bush wanted to manage the information flow so that it would support the political goals in the Gulf.<sup>144</sup>

These restrictions met with mixed reactions. Most Americans also believed that the press should be kept away from the war. Additionally, those polled felt that the press had damaged America's ability to fight in Vietnam. A majority also trusted the information that the White House and military were providing.<sup>145</sup> The press on the other hand felt that the restrictions were impossibly strict.<sup>146</sup> In fact, several reporters tried to go out on their own, outside of the pools. One such attempt met with tragedy. Iraqi soldiers captured Bob Simon and three other members of the CBS news crew while they were driving alone near the Iraqi/Kuwaiti border. Simon and the others were beaten and tortured by Iraqis for nearly forty days.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Hilsman at 142.

<sup>143</sup> CENTCOM Guidelines for News Media, 14 January 1991, as quoted in Congressional Record 102nd Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 20 February 1991.

<sup>144</sup> Jason DeParle, *Keeping the News in Step: Are the Pentagon's Gulf War Rules Here to Stay?*, New York Times, 6 May 1991, at A-9.

<sup>145</sup> Hilsman at 144.

<sup>146</sup> Id. at 143.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor at 61.

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The press complained that only 126 reporters were allowed into the polls; the rest had to stay in hotels in Dhahran or Riyadh. These reporters who stayed behind were allowed to benefit from the efforts of the pool reporters. The rules set by the military required the pool reporters to share all information with all other reporters. This angered some in the media who claimed that it was stifling the independence of the press.<sup>148</sup> Many in the media also thought that the restrictions only served to prevent negative stories from reaching the American public and effecting public opinion.<sup>149</sup> The military, on the other hand, claimed that the restrictions were necessary for several reasons. Chief among these was the safety of the members of the media. As Mr. Simon's experience shows, Iraq was a very dangerous place. The pool system was created according to the Assistant Secretary of Defense, to allow reporters to cover the war in areas where there is no American media presence, while still protecting the safety and element of surprise for American troops.<sup>150</sup>

There were worries that the anticipated rapid pace of the ground war, and that the Iraqis would resort to chemical weapons, would place reporters in harm's way.<sup>151</sup> It is important to remember that when the war began, there were no foreign journalists based in Saudi Arabia. This was a country widely considered to be one of the most hostile to the rights of free press.<sup>152</sup> Saudi Arabia had never had to provide for the numbers of media who now wanted access to their country. The safety of the troops in the Gulf was

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<sup>148</sup> Hilsman at 148.

<sup>149</sup> Patrick Sloyan, *The War that the Administration Isn't Going to let You See*, Washington Post National Weekly Edition, January 21-27 1991 at page 23.

<sup>150</sup> Congressional Record, 101<sup>st</sup> Session, 20 February 1991, at 6.

<sup>151</sup> Michael Gordon, *Pentagon Seeks Tight Limits on Gulf War Reporters*, New York Times, 4 January 1991, A-10.

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at odds with the independent presence of the media. Bands of reporters could not be allowed to roam around the battlefield during the ground war. This would only create more confusion in an already confusing time, but would also create a logistical nightmare. A commander must know how many troops and vehicles are in a particular place during war, controlling access to the war would obviously make war more manageable for commanders.

Critics of the restrictions claimed that the access to the war and the security reviews amounted to outright censorship in violation of the First Amendment. In a somewhat disjointed address to Congress, Walter Cronkite, on one hand, favored the censoring of all dispatches leaving the battlefield to protect troops and operations.<sup>153</sup> Cronkite, on the other hand, stated that he was against the military's control of the press even though he thought it was favored by the American public.<sup>154</sup> Cronkite disagreed with the safety rationale for denying access to the front. He reasoned that the safety of the media was not a concern for the military. It was only the responsibility of each individual member of the media.<sup>155</sup> Cronkite ignores the fact that having more non-participants in the area of operations would only exacerbate the inherent fog and confusion of any war. Additionally, Cronkite is simply wrong in his statement of battlefield responsibility. The commander is responsible for the safety of all individuals who accompany his troops into battle. Cronkite's request to the Senate was absurd, on one hand arguing that the media should be allowed to determine whether the story is worth the risk to the safety of the

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<sup>152</sup> McArthur at 4.

<sup>153</sup> Walter Cronkite, as quoted in Congressional Record 101<sup>st</sup> Session, 20 February 1991, at 21.

<sup>154</sup> Id. at 21.

<sup>155</sup> Id. at 22.

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reporter, on the other hand, he requests military vehicles and drivers to transport the media to the battle zones.<sup>156</sup> Apparently the media should also be entrusted to determine if their story is worth the life of the military driver.

In short, the media claims were simply a request to return to the good old days of free reign under Johnson. Despite the claims of rampant censorship, as of 24 May 1991, only five stories were reported to have been held up by the security reviews. Of these, four were eventually released as written. The remaining story was determined by the editor of the publication to containing material potentially damaging to the operation and was not released.<sup>157</sup> It would seem that the press has given the First Amendment a very expansive reading. They would argue that it allows Carte Blanch to go wherever they please rather than protecting the right to publish what they choose. Not all of the media felt stifled however. Some reporters felt that the pool system was the only real effective way to manage gulf war reporting. Frank Bruni of the Detroit free press remarked, "I don't know a system where reporters can simply drive to the war, honk the horn at the gate, and be let in. You can't bring in every reporter who wants to go, if you did I truly believe it would be chaos."<sup>158</sup>

The media, however, was successful in getting the restrictions relaxed. On March 4, 1991 Department of Defense to relaxed the restrictions on the media pursuant to Congressional pressure.<sup>159</sup> Fortunately, Barbara Boxer, Louis Stokes et al came to the rescue of the press too late. The war had already reached a stage at which the meddling

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<sup>156</sup> Id. at 22.

<sup>157</sup> Pete Williams as quoted Id. at 143.

<sup>158</sup> Mark Mooney, *Muzzled Reporters Growl at Pentagon Censorship*, New York Post, 23 January 1991, A-17.



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of the politicians could do no real damage. In the future, perhaps it would be better to follow the Saudi model of expelling media members from the area of operations. The media seemed to have forgotten that without the assistance of the Department of Defense they would never have been granted entrance visas to Saudi Arabia.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, they ignore the fact that we were not fighting in America. We were fighting in another nation whose laws and customs we had to obey.

**VI. UTILIZATION OF MILITARY**

In addition to the misuse of the public and of the media, President Johnson also failed to properly use the military at his disposal. President Bush avoided this Johnson mistake from Vietnam, in not copying Johnson in his approach to the military. Johnson came into the White House with a long held distrust of the military and military officers.<sup>161</sup> Throughout his presidency, Johnson treated the military leaders as more of political opponents rather than as trusted advisers.<sup>162</sup> In fact in his first three weeks as president, he fired three military aides because they “got in his way.”<sup>163</sup>

**A. MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN VIETNAM**

Johnson and MacNamara avoided contact with the Joint Chiefs of Staff dismissing their opinions on even the most crucial matters as strategy, tactics and even targeting.<sup>164</sup> In fact from June 1965 through June 1966, the Army Chief of Staff met privately with the

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<sup>159</sup> Congressional Record, 101<sup>st</sup> Session, 20 February, 1991, at 1443.

<sup>160</sup> MacArthur at 6.

<sup>161</sup> McMaster at 52.

<sup>162</sup> Id. at 87.

<sup>163</sup> Id. at 53.

<sup>164</sup> Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy*, 42 (Presidio Press, Novato, Ca., 1982).

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President on only two occasions.<sup>165</sup> The JCS were even excluded from a working group that was formed to examine the interests and roles of the US in Vietnam and develop courses of action for the US policy. Although there was one military member included in the group, the nature of these meeting effectively precluded the member from adequately conferring with the JCS. In effect, the JCS were shut out and unable to interject their ideas into the proposals of the group.<sup>166</sup> It was this group that came up with the principle of gradual pressure against North Vietnam that was later adopted by Johnson.<sup>167</sup>

Johnson, instead of using his military leaders, turned the military decision making over to Robert McNamara. McNamara surrounded himself with a group of highly educated young men with little or no real military experience.<sup>168</sup> These “whiz kids” as they came to be known, shared McNamara’s distrust of and disregard for the military. The JCS in turn had no real use for McNamara’s staff. General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff remarked, “they were the most egotistical people that I ever saw in my life. They had no faith in the military; they had no respect for the military at all. They felt that the Harvard Business School method of solving problems would solve any problem in the world. They were better than all of the rest of us; otherwise they wouldn’t have gotten their superior education.”<sup>169</sup> Most illustrative of Johnson and McNamara’s shutting out of the military leadership was in the selection of bombing targets. The targets that were bombed during Johnson’s tenure were selected during what came to be known as the

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<sup>165</sup> Id. at 42.

<sup>166</sup> McMaster at 180.

<sup>167</sup> Id. at 184.

<sup>168</sup> McMaster at 19.

<sup>169</sup> General Curtis LeMay as quoted in McMaster at 20.

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“Tuesday lunches.”<sup>170</sup> The name did absolute justice to the way these meetings were held. They were literally lunches attended by the president, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the Press Secretary and an occasional presidential assistant. Johnson viewed these lunches as the critical focus of the national security process. In practice, he didn’t invite the JCS because he didn’t want to hear their advice.<sup>171</sup> Interestingly enough these meetings were absolutely void of any military presence until late in 1967, when the Administration began to come under fire for ignoring the JCS.<sup>172</sup> The Tuesday Lunches would not only pick the targets to be bombed during the next week, they would also, at times, determine what tactics the pilots could utilize. The bombing occurred under an operation termed “Rolling Thunder.” Rolling Thunder was designed under McNamara’s gradual bombing strategy. Johnson initially believed that by utilizing an air war we could avoid large deployments of ground troops, this belief proved to be mistaken. With the increases in air strikes using fighter-bombers the need for troops to provide air base defense grew as well.<sup>173</sup> Additionally, the bombing campaign was not meeting its objectives, ambiguous as they were. This “tit for tat” bombing campaign was the extent of the air war during the first years of the war.<sup>174</sup> The strategy behind Rolling Thunder was extremely ambiguous. In fact, members of Johnson’s Administration gave vastly different accounts of exactly what the objectives of the operation were.<sup>175</sup> The bombing was supposed to gradually increase with North Vietnam’s failure to halt their aggression.

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<sup>170</sup> Sharp at 86.

<sup>171</sup> McMaster at 88.

<sup>172</sup> Id. at 86.

<sup>173</sup> Elliot at 50.

<sup>174</sup> Dougan at 58.

<sup>175</sup> McMaster at 234.

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If this sounds bad in theory, it was worse in practice. Rolling Thunder lasted for over three years and during the campaign over 643,000 tons of bombs were dropped on North Vietnam.<sup>176</sup> The result was that the North Vietnamese were unhampered in conducting insurgencies in the South. Rolling Thunder had failed to teach the North Vietnamese to stay in the North, and the South Vietnamese were unable to adequately control the North Vietnamese. The Administration felt that South Vietnam was near collapse and saw no other course of action other than sending in additional US combat troops who had the energy, mobility and sufficient firepower to take the war to the North Vietnamese.<sup>177</sup> In addition to the planned escalation of the severity of bombing, Johnson had begun to escalate the number of ground troops. The failure of the Rolling Thunder campaign was not because of the pilots or the planes.

This campaign was doomed from the start. Johnson tried to conduct a campaign that's strategy was based on unclear objectives. The strategy was virtually void of any initiative, and was definitely void of a coherent plan for victory.<sup>178</sup> In addition to not having a plan for victory, Rolling Thunder was hampered by the extreme restrictions placed on the operation by Johnson. President Johnson had determined that he would not authorize use of the B-52 bomber in these strikes. Using the B-52 instead in South Vietnamese bombing strikes. Johnson felt that the use of the use of the B-52s in the North was "too provocative."<sup>179</sup> Additionally, Johnson limited targets that the US pilots could strike in the north. Raids against Hanoi and Haiphong were prohibited, as were targets

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<sup>176</sup> Id. at 234.

<sup>177</sup> Herbert Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President*, 26 (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1977).

<sup>178</sup> Summers, *On Strategy I*, at 67.

<sup>179</sup> Clodfelter at 119.

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within a 30-mile radius from the center of Hanoi and a 10-mile radius from the center of Haiphong.<sup>180</sup> Although these restrictions were eventually loosened, the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong was prohibited during the entirety of Rolling Thunder. The choice of targets also fell victim to the lack of objective. Not only would the outcome of the Tuesday lunches determine what targets would be hit, they would also call occasional halts to the bombings.

On eight separate occasions, bombing was halted during Rolling Thunder.<sup>181</sup> Halting the bombings was another of McNamara's ideas. McNamara believed that much of the value of Rolling Thunder would be in its use as a bargaining chip. That is to say that the United States could use the offer of a bombing halt to get the North Vietnamese to negotiate.<sup>182</sup> The bombing halts were another strategy that was not accepted in its entirety by the Administration.

Although the JCS were kept out of the Tuesday Lunches, they made their feelings known to McNamara. Even McNamara admits that the Joint Chiefs were against the "gradualism" of the Administration's policy. The JCS were so dissatisfied with the gradual approach to the air war that they held war games to test McNamara's theory. They may as well have used a crystal ball. The games predicted that a small amount of bombing by the U.S. would lead to the U.S. committing sizable numbers of troops, without measurably hampering North Vietnamese aggression. The report on the games also warned that the American public would not support such a strategy.<sup>183</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>180</sup> Id. at 119.

<sup>181</sup> Id. at 120.

<sup>182</sup> Schandler at 137.

<sup>183</sup> McMaster at 90.

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the JCS had informed McNamara that the long delays in approving target was giving the North Vietnamese time to prepare for the attacks by building up reserves of petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) and other items they could anticipate would be destroyed by the fairly predictable bombings. McNamara however disagreed with the JCS, believing that the gradualism “was saving American lives without penalizing the progress of the war.”<sup>184</sup> The gradual approach to the war, a McNamara hallmark, was something that the American people found frustrating. Numerous polls have shown that even those Americans who did not support the U.S. being involved in the war in Vietnam wished the war to be stepped up and finished.<sup>185</sup> The military found it just as frustrating time and time again the JCS recommended to McNamara and Johnson that the U.S. employ a relentless offensive against the north Vietnamese, especially in the area of bombing. The JCS argued for a rapid and merciless force applied to the North Vietnamese. This proposal was to inflict maximum impact on the North Vietnamese while bringing about the minimum loss to the U.S.<sup>186</sup> These recommendations fell on deaf ears.<sup>187</sup> The JCS knew that the bombing was not accomplishing anything and especially given the frequent halts.<sup>188</sup>

It wasn't only the target selection that was kept away from the military leaders. Even after the Vietnamese mortared Bien Hoa Air Base in violation of Johnson's promise that there would be reprisals for any Communist attack on Americans, Johnson disregarded the JCS opinion for immediate bombing. Johnson chose instead to do nothing. Despite

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<sup>184</sup> McNamara at 285.

<sup>185</sup> Dougan at 118.

<sup>186</sup> Summers, *On Strategy I* at 118.

<sup>187</sup> Karnow at 48.

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these constant presidential rebuffs, the JCS stayed away from publicly attacking the administration's policies. Inherent in being an officer is the fact that your recommendations are not always followed. In which case you take your direction from your boss, accept them and move on.<sup>189</sup> It seems to have become popular to place the blame for our loss in Vietnam on both the political and the military leaders. In fact, Colonel Harry Summers, (United States Army Retired) puts a great deal of the blame for the failed strategies at the feet of the JCS.<sup>190</sup> Apparently, in Col. Summers' view, the JCS should have either attacked Johnson in public, or resigned in protest of the gradualism policy.<sup>191</sup> As stated earlier, the JCS often expressed their dissatisfaction with the way that the war was being fought to McNamara. Having expressed their opinions and made their recommendations, the JCS did the only thing that they could do – they went about their duties. If the JCS felt that they were the best military thinkers in the positions, then the best thing they could have done was to stay in the position to try to save American lives. Had the JCS resigned, as Summers proposes, there would may have been no real benefit to the country. Generals who may have been less vocally critical of the policy or who agreed with gradualism would have replaced the JCS. We may have simply traded a muzzled JCS for one that actively supported a weak war plan. The question remains as to how the resignation would have affected Johnson. Had a resignation opened his eyes to the folly of his prosecution of the war, there would have been some real benefits. We simply do not know how Johnson would have reacted. We can predict that the American

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<sup>188</sup> Bergerund at 90.

<sup>189</sup> McMaster at 83.

<sup>190</sup> Summers I at 120.

<sup>191</sup> Id. at 120.

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public would have reacted strongly. Whether this would have lead to a call for the immediate pullout of American troops or simply a change in strategy we can't guess. Lacking a vast change in strategy on the part of Johnson, resignation would have, at best, maintained the status quo, and at worst exacerbated the problem. Summers argument that the JCS were derelict in not warning the president that his strategy would fail is contrary to the facts. The JCS brought their disagreement to the Presidents attention through outright disagreement, to warnings, to war games. In fact, in August 1967, the JCS testified before Congress that the Administration had tied their hands behind their backs creating a military stalemate. The JCS argued to Congress for massive strategic bombing without the strict target limitations in effect.<sup>192</sup> The JCS attempted to tell, convince and demonstrate that the strategy would fail. Unfortunately, no one was listening. The question remains as to how Colonel Summers would have responded to a subordinate publicly expressing dissatisfaction with his orders.

The lesson the McNamara and Johnson had not learned was that generally Americans have very little patience with foreign affairs. Rather, they tend to think in terms of a sporting event that does not allow for ambiguous results. The game ends in a reasonable time, either you win or lose, and everyone goes back to doing something else.<sup>193</sup> Or as Nixon stated the time runs out.

### **B. MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN THE GULF WAR**

President Bush had learned from the failed policies of Johnson/McNamara and had determined to allow the military leaders make the military decisions. In short to let the

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<sup>192</sup> Bernstein at 357.



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military fight the war. Although responsible for setting our goals and ultimately responsible for our military as Commander in Chief, Bush trusted his Joint Chiefs to make the appropriate decisions. Obviously President Bush was briefed on the status of the war, but he did not employ the “Tuesday Lunch” method of prosecuting a war. Target selection was made as needed, and Bush was not in the business of approving every target as Johnson/McNamara had in Vietnam. In fact, prior to US planes striking Iraqi biological warfare storage areas, target briefings were not given to the President.<sup>194</sup> The need for the rapid destruction of these weapon storage areas would have been impossible to meet under the “Tuesday Lunch” method. It is impossible to guess the outcome of the war had Iraq been able to deploy biological weapons. Bush’s open reliance upon the military leaders sent several messages to the American people. First, it sent the obvious message that the President did trust the military. This was a world away from Johnson’s open distrust of the military. This could only boost the public’s faith in our military leadership. Time and time again, President Bush sang the praises of the US military leadership for their competence, integrity, and ability.<sup>195</sup> This open show of faith sent the message to the American public that our military can be trusted to do the right thing. In short, the military was worthy of the nation’s support. The second major message sent by President Bush’s support of the military was that the Gulf War was not a politicized war like Vietnam. This would not degenerate into “George Bush’s war” as Vietnam had turned to being “Johnson’s war,” bush had decided to give a free hand to the

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<sup>193</sup> Geyer at 134.

<sup>194</sup> Horner Frontline Interview, 9 January 1996, WGBH Educational. Foundation.

<sup>195</sup> Schwarzkopf at 366.

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pentagon in determining strategy.<sup>196</sup> The Bush administration made the Gulf War more than an exercise in political power. The Gulf War became an example of using military power to do the right thing. Bush, taking the opposite approach of Johnson's, went out of his way to give the American people the belief that the Gulf War was a "people's war". Apparently, this approach worked. Public opinion was heavily in favor of the President with 79% of those polled supporting Bush's Gulf War policies.<sup>197</sup> The final message sent was that this would not be an ambiguous exercise militarily. As stated earlier, Bush had set out clear objectives at the start of the war, he also moved his objectives along as quickly as possible avoiding any resemblance to the gradualism of Vietnam. For example, Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the next day, Bush had sent Secretary of defense Dick Cheney to the gulf region with the U.S. objectives which included the immediate, complete and unconditional of Iraqi forces from Kuwait.<sup>198</sup> Further within 72 hours of the invasion, an aircraft carrier was diverted to the North Arabian Sea and within another 72 there was another carrier.<sup>199</sup> Finally, within a day of the invasion, President Bush met with the JCS to determine appropriate action.<sup>200</sup> The credibility that the JCS had with Bush can be seen by example from these meetings. At the outset, Bush wasn't sure that the US should get involved other than diplomatically. At the weekend meeting with the JCS, Bush asked for their ideas on what tactics could be employed by American militarily against Iraq. After hearing out the JCS at these meetings, Bush decided to send troops to the Gulf. The swiftness of this decision shocked even General Colin Powell

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<sup>196</sup> Praeger at 81.

<sup>197</sup> Taylor at 48.

<sup>198</sup> Andrew Bennett, *Friends in Need*, 40 (St. Martins Press, New York, 1997).

<sup>199</sup> Joseph Nye, *After the War*, 204 (Madison Books, New York, 1992).

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(Chairman of JCS) who marveled at how far Bush had come in such a short time.<sup>201</sup> Once this decision had been made, Bush demanded that the deployment start as soon as possible. Similarly, once the decision to begin the air war had been made, Bush instructed the military leaders to take every action necessary to prevail as quickly as possible.<sup>202</sup> This decisiveness made an impact on Powell who believed that the major lesson from Vietnam was not to escalate gradually, but to begin with an overwhelming force and apply it relentlessly.<sup>203</sup> Because of the lessons learned in Vietnam, President Bush gave the military leaders wide latitude in determining targets during the Gulf War. The concepts of gradualism and of civilians making targeting choices to send political messages were deemed failures and were not considered as viable alternatives.<sup>204</sup> The telling choice for the code name for the air war “Instant Thunder” highlighted the different mind set for the Gulf War. There would be no gradualism or Rolling Thunder during the Gulf War. Obviously, there were vast differences between the roles of the JCS in Vietnam and the Gulf War, there were also great differences in the way that the respective administrations utilized the indigenous peoples during the wars.

**C. USE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN VIETNAM**

During the war in Vietnam, the United States had at its disposal the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). There had to be a decision on how the ARVN, and other South Vietnamese, would be used due to serious political implications. The Johnson administration saw the decision as between taking over the fight from the ARVN and

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<sup>200</sup> Hilsman at 44.

<sup>201</sup> Id. at 46.

<sup>202</sup> Geyer at 127.

<sup>203</sup> Hilsman at 97.

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letting ARVN fight the war alone. The former ran the risk of giving the South Vietnamese the impression that the Americans were taking over. That could have had drastic effects on the government constantly in turmoil. The latter was not at all realistic in that it would have been tantamount to surrendering South Vietnam to the communists.<sup>205</sup> It would seem that the best strategy would have been somewhere in the middle; one of training and equipping the South Vietnamese so that they could fight the war on their own. Johnson decided to continue the policy, started under the Kennedy Administration, of sending American troops to South Vietnam as trainers and advisers. The initial determination by Kennedy was made after he rejected the recommendation of military leaders to send in a large number of forces prior to mid-1964.<sup>206</sup> These advisers were to engage in training and advising the South Vietnamese troops. Under Kennedy, they were to accompany South Vietnamese troops into combat and return fire only if fired upon.<sup>207</sup> Originally falling under the Military Assistance Group (MAAG), the numbers constantly increased under Kennedy. The role of the MAAG troops changed dramatically over the first year of Johnson's presidency. In August of 1964, with the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, America's role also changed. Johnson ordered air strikes into North Vietnam.<sup>208</sup> Although our role had certainly changed, the question of ARVN's role remained.

McNamara had hoped in 1963 that the training of South Vietnamese forces could have been completed by 1965 and that the American forces could begin pulling out shortly

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<sup>204</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Gulf Conflict*, 318 (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993).

<sup>205</sup> Cohen at 97.

<sup>206</sup> Elliot at 30.

<sup>207</sup> Nixon at 73.

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thereafter.<sup>209</sup> With the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin, this became impossible. Instead of being able to train the AVRN and leave, Johnson expanded our role and America was effectively at war. An important additional factor to be considered in determining an appropriate role for the ARVN was that the South Vietnamese were extremely sensitive about the any appearance of a threat to their sovereignty.<sup>210</sup> This was especially true under the fiercely nationalistic President Diem.<sup>211</sup> It was important to give the ARVN meaningful roles in the defense of their country and not simply place them at guard posts. The American people would also be weary of simply going into Vietnam and taking over their war. The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations both understood the public opinion aspects of keeping the Vietnamese involved in an Asian war. By 1964, Johnson knew that the American public would not stand for an Asian war being fought by Americans. Johnson kept reassuring the American people that this would not happen. Our troops were going to Vietnam to help defend the South Vietnamese from the aggressive North Vietnamese, but his would not become an American war.<sup>212</sup> In addition to simply providing more troops, proper utilization of the ARVN troops would have helped retain a "Vietnamese face" on the war, in Vietnam, in America, and the world. McNamara stated that by "allowing a major role for South Vietnam would have the same effect of portraying to the us and the world that we continue to regard the war as a conflict that the South Vietnamese must win and take ultimate responsibility for."<sup>213</sup> Keeping the

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<sup>208</sup> Id. at 75.

<sup>209</sup> Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 78 ( Random House, New York, 1995).

<sup>210</sup> Bergerund at 40.

<sup>211</sup> Nixon at 62.

<sup>212</sup> Wills at 12.

<sup>213</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, (The Senator Gravel Edition) (Boston Beacon Press, 1971) VII at 459.

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ARVN in positions of responsibility would help to establish and maintain a base of support with the Vietnamese people. Additionally, the North Vietnamese were using the contact with the Americans extensively in their propaganda programs. The North Vietnamese were claiming that the ARVN was being used as a willing puppet under the imperialistic American Army and that they could not be trusted to defend the best interests of the people.<sup>214</sup> In short, the Americans were simply a replacement for the French. To combat this propaganda attempt, the ARVN troops had to be seen in key roles and the ARVN officers had to be in leadership roles.

However, the ARVN troops were not improving as fast as the US trainers had hoped they would, and, as stated earlier, Americans had to take a greater and great role in the war.<sup>215</sup> This escalated until 1965 when Johnson ordered American ground troops into the war, ostensibly to defend military and air bases, and finally providing a majority of the combat forces. Unbeknownst to the American public however, when Johnson was telling them that US forces were going in to help and not to “fight the war,” American forces had already begun offensive operations with ARVN troops.<sup>216</sup>

Because we had begun operations with the ARVN we were forced to decide how we would use them and what these ‘key roles’ would be. Given our lack of clear objectives, determining an appropriate role for the South Vietnamese turned out to be an ambiguous exercise. This is especially true when you consider how difficult it was for Johnson to determine the scope of America’s role. At the outset, South Vietnamese troops were utilized to fight ‘their war’, but as North Vietnamese forces continued to grow, Johnson

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<sup>214</sup> Nixon 62.

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feared that South Vietnam would fall. After large numbers of American troops entered Vietnam, the South Vietnamese were mostly relegated to a defensive posture. Johnson had started to do exactly what he had not wanted to do. They were to defend static areas, those permanent structures like bridges and public works that were potential targets. The policy of the American ground troops had, for all purposes, turned around. Instead of the U.S. trying to provide defensive troops so that ARVN could fight war, we were now relegating ARVN troops to defensive roles so that we could fight war.<sup>217</sup> There were however special programs involving the South Vietnamese attempted throughout the war.

The success of these programs gets mixed reviews. There were some success stories and there were some failures. One of the success stories, at least to a certain extent was as the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). The CIDGs were made up of Montagnards trained by Special Forces troops acting under MAAG. The Special Forces had grown tremendously from infancy under President Kennedy who had become enamored with these specially trained soldiers. The Montagnards were simple tribes people who lived a jungle/mountain existence within the almost inaccessible Vietnamese interior.<sup>218</sup> The Montagnards were held in very low esteem by both the ARVN troops and by the North Vietnamese, who considered them savages. The Special Forces by and large developed a special kinship, based upon a mutual respect, with the CIDGs they were charged with training. The CIDG was trained in basic military skills, weapons, marksmanship, and simple explosives. The Special Forces also provided social/welfare

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<sup>215</sup> Bergerund at 40.

<sup>216</sup> McMaster at 84.

<sup>217</sup> Schandler at 24.

<sup>218</sup> Elliot at 28.

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and medical programs. The Special Forces troops would virtually become Montagnards. They would eat, sleep and socialize with those they trained.<sup>219</sup> They did not require the large amount of training that the ARVN troops were undergoing, because they were meant to serve as a defense force for the local community. The CIDG were extremely successful at the outset. They were fierce fighters and their morale was excellent. This is attributable to one factor that was not present with the ARVN troops. The CIDG were fighting for their villages. They were operating out of their villages and protecting their homes. This not only increased the morale of the Montagnards, but it also gave them a reason to fight. Additionally because they were fighting in their own back yards, no one knew the area any better than they did. They knew the short cuts, they knew who should be in certain areas and more importantly they knew who shouldn't be in those areas. The CIDG program was soon enlarged to include other minorities within Vietnam.<sup>220</sup> Their success was so impressive that the North Vietnamese began to leave the known CIDG areas alone during their insurgencies into the south.<sup>221</sup> The success didn't last as long as it could have. When President Kennedy expanded the role of American troops in 1963, he also ordered the reorganization of our training units; replacing the MAAG with the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV).<sup>222</sup> This change did not effect CIDG right away, but eventually MACV started to move CIDG farther and farther away from their home villages so they could serve as examples to other larger units. MACV failed to understand that the strength of CIDG lied in the fact that they were defending their

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<sup>219</sup> Id. at 29.

<sup>220</sup> Id. at 30.

<sup>221</sup> Id. at 32.

<sup>222</sup> Id. at 33.



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homes. Eventually, the morale of the Montagnards started to drop and they lost their incentive to fight. After the CIDG forces were effectively diluted by MACV, they were turned over to ARVN to be used as regional defense and border control troops.<sup>223</sup> The moves spelled the end for the CIDG. For a short time, the example set by the Special Forces was followed by the Marines Combined Action Platoons (CAPs). The CAPs worked in conjunction with South Vietnamese village defense units. They remained attached on a local level and provided medical assistance as well as military training. Although these programs were initially successful, the Marines were not allowed to stay with a particular village for a long enough period to be successful. The larger army units that move in after the marines were not interested in maintaining this program.<sup>224</sup> CIDG programs proved that if the indigenous population was given appropriate training, enough time and a reasonable mission, they could provide excellent assistance as defenders of local villages. This would be especially true in defending their own villages. By implementing and maintaining these types of programs, the US troops could have avoided wasting assets on village defense. Again, with no clear objectives, the military operations were unstable with no real hope for long term support from the Administration.<sup>225</sup> In addition to the CIDG program, there were other attempts at utilizing the indigenous peoples of Vietnam. The first, the Strategic Hamlet program, had at its basis moving villages to safe locations and setting up new villages. The program had mixed reviews, but in reality was simply not given enough time to be effective.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Id. at 35.

<sup>224</sup> Id. at 35.

<sup>225</sup> William Colby, *Honorable Men*, 223 (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1978).

<sup>226</sup> Bergerund at 53.

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Additionally, the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program was a counter-insurgency experiment also tested in Vietnam. Although looked at by most as a potentially successful program, the program was ended in 1966 by McNamara who claimed that it was a failure.<sup>227</sup> Again, the Administration pulled the plug on an operation before it could prove itself.

Despite some success, the potential of the ARVN as a whole was not fully realized. Because we had determined to use them mostly as a defensive force, we did not adequately prepare them for large offensive actions.<sup>228</sup> We did not begin motivating the ARVN troops to fight their own war until we began the "Vietnamization".<sup>229</sup> Plainly speaking, they weren't motivated to fight their own war until they had to be. Once America had decided to pull troops out, ARVN no longer had a choice.

The training provided to the South Vietnamese was seen as questionable, and at times so was their performance. The manner in which they were trained and utilized, however needs to be considered when judging their performance. In addition to a main role as a defense force, they also provided offensive operation in concert with the U.S. troops. U.S. troops found it somewhat frustrating that the bulk of the South Vietnamese troops were receiving conventional training and then asked to fight an unconventional war during the search and destroy operations.<sup>230</sup> The abilities of the South Vietnamese troops however, became obvious during Tet and then later in the war. The South Vietnamese

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<sup>227</sup> Elliott at 103.

<sup>228</sup> Scott Thompson, *Lessons of Vietnam*, 242 (Crane, Russack and Company, New York, 1977).

<sup>229</sup> Id. at 243.

<sup>230</sup> Sheehan at 91.

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troops have been criticized as being timid,<sup>231</sup> undisciplined, and suffering from an unwillingness to fight.<sup>232</sup> These characterizations although true in some cases, did not represent the majority of ARVN troops. The fact of the matter is that ARVN troops had exhibited extreme gallantry in battles such as at Hue when they were fighting at 50% troop strength.<sup>233</sup> The problem came down to training and leadership. Many of the officers were inexperienced, and many were from the privileged families while their troops were usually poor conscripts. It was seen by at least one of the advisers that "there was a real difference between the officers and the troops. The officers were urban, privileged, Catholic and spoke French. The soldiers were usually rural Buddhists. The officers were always immaculately dressed and never helped with manual labor. There was a real feeling of aristocracy. The officers treated the NCOs and troops like dirt."<sup>234</sup> There was a definite problem among the ARVN officers in looking out for the interests of their troops and treating them, at all humanely.<sup>235</sup> It seemed that the South Vietnamese soldier responded to the level of leadership that was exhibited. A good officer meant that the troops were likely to have good morale and their performance would bear this out. The poor leaders, however, would lead largely unmotivated troops who were prone to desertion.<sup>236</sup> Another problem was that the South Vietnamese, due in part to their training and their leadership, exhibited a fortress mentality. It was increasingly difficult to organize effective offensive operations. This is also due to McNamara's war plan.

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<sup>231</sup> John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam*, 54 (Office of USAF History, Washington D.C., 1988).

<sup>232</sup> Sheehan at 90.

<sup>233</sup> Sevy at 161.

<sup>234</sup> Richard O'Hare as quoted in Bergerund at 230.

<sup>235</sup> David Fulgram, *South Vietnam on Trial*, 55 (Boston Publishing, 1984).

<sup>236</sup> Id. at 58.

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ARVN had grown accustomed to playing defensive and mop up roles by 1966 due to the reliance on Rolling Thunder.<sup>237</sup> The danger of this was seen early in Vietnam by General Lansdale who recommended to JFK that the adviser role be more of a lead by example role. Lansdale wanted to give the advisers more autonomy and shield them from the bureaucratic influence of Washington. JFK however, decided to maintain what Lansdale considered a "vague role" for the advisers. The result was that despite years of training ARVN's overall military ability showed only marginal improvement under the tentative Johnson/McNamara approach.<sup>238</sup>

Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) had even more serious problems. VNAF was never able to fully integrate into the USAF tactical control system. This meant that the VNAF had little or no intelligence support and was of little use to ARVN ground forces.<sup>239</sup> Additionally, the lack of training provided to the forward air controllers (FACs) caused the VNAF to operate with even less in the form of intelligence. The problem was so profound, American FACs had to direct nearly all of the VNAF fighter strikes.<sup>240</sup> The difficulty of the VNAF in getting off the ground, if you will, was that under McNamara's strategy in Rolling Thunder, we were asking the VNAF to attempt to join in an operation that was beyond their scope. They were simply not suited for interface with this type of operation. They were however able to prove themselves after the bombing limitations were removed by Nixon. By March 1972, the South Vietnamese were flying 90 percent

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<sup>237</sup> Id. at 56.

<sup>238</sup> Bergerund at 106.

<sup>239</sup> Schlight at 12.

<sup>240</sup> Id. at 97.

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of the strike sorties in South Vietnam.<sup>241</sup> Because of the inability to function within our tactical control system in Rolling Thunder, VNAF was not able to become the key player that they eventually became, until years after they should have. Similarly, the ground forces were also eventually able to prove themselves as a force in their own right. During the Easter invasion of 1972, ARVN troops held out for over two months at An Loc against a far superior North Vietnamese force. Major General James F. Hollingsworth stated that he had seen “nothing in my thirty-four years as a soldier to surpass the determination of the ARVN troops at An Loc.”<sup>242</sup> These successful operations on the part of ARVN and VNAF show that the indigenous peoples of Vietnam could have been a great asset at a much earlier date had the United States chosen to take advantage of their skills. General George Keegan commented that, “we trained an army and we trained an air force. Wrong equipment, wrong tactics, wrong doctrines, but we produced an army. As to equipment, tactics and doctrine, it was not until 1968 that we began to think very consciously that we have to make this fellow self-sustained.”<sup>243</sup>

A further impediment to fully utilizing the South Vietnamese forces was the lack of unity of command. The United States had a senior U.S. commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, there was a separate commander for ARVN forces, another for the Koreans, and another for other allied forces. This stemmed in part, from the fear that the South Vietnamese would see having an American commander as an encroachment on their sovereignty. Although we expected the South Vietnamese military to follow our strategy or “game plan,” if you will, we were at a loss for how to control them. The fear of

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<sup>241</sup> Herman Gilster, *Air War in SouthEast Asia*, 62 (Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, AL. 1993).

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openly taking over the war was too much of a threat for our leaders, as was actually turning it over to the South Vietnamese. Although this tactic worked in the later years of the war when Nixon finally brought about “vietnamization,” it was doomed to failure as long as we were de facto fighting the war. Instead of a unified command, we fought a war through use of cooperation and mutual support. Because of this lack of unity of command, we had virtually no say in the selection of ARVN troops to be utilized. In fact, VNAF Commander Ky drained the VNAF of many of the quality officers to go into the government with him, leaving a group of largely untrained people as replacements.<sup>244</sup> Further, the Vietnamese would pull troops out of training after only 30-45 days claiming that the training was taking too long. In their place, the South Vietnamese would leave a group of untrained men so that the process would have to start from scratch.<sup>245</sup> General Westmoreland was against putting ARVN troops under a single unified command. General York constantly recommended to Westmoreland that he adopt a joint command in hope of properly training the South Vietnamese troops. York proposed a single commander, integrating U.S. officers into all of South Vietnamese echelons from the top down to field level. In this way, Westmoreland could have quick access to hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese troops. York further suggested joint U.S./South Vietnamese units. These would form a basis of experience and training of South Vietnamese troops. In this manner, York believed, we could produce good officers, NCOs and soldiers by example. It was also important to make the Vice or Deputy

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<sup>242</sup> Thompson at 162.

<sup>243</sup> Id. at 244.

<sup>244</sup> Schlight at 12.

<sup>245</sup> Sheehan at 553.

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commander of these units a South Vietnamese officer.<sup>246</sup> Westmoreland disagreed; he believed that subordinating the ARVN under U.S. control would hamper the growth of their leaders and delay their acceptance of responsibility in defending their country.<sup>247</sup> At the same time, however, Westmoreland had mostly utilized the ARVN forces for defense and pacification. Westmoreland's insistence that the commands remain separate led to the U.S. and South Vietnamese fighting parallel but separate wars.<sup>248</sup> Again, although we did not have a unity of command, and were not able to take advantage of its benefits, we had responsibility for the prosecution of the war. It would seem that we chose the path that had no pluses, only minuses. We had to fight the war, we were unable to adequately utilize the South Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese were not being trained adequately, and we were not instilling the sense of responsibility for the war as long as we were fighting it in the McNamara/Johnson manner. It was held among South Vietnamese soldiers that the South Vietnamese had no real military doctrine for the war. There was no strategy; the South Vietnamese were simply following the strategy as dictated by the Americans based upon American objectives.<sup>249</sup> There was the perception that the Americans took over the war and tried to do everything. The South Vietnamese thought that it caused the South Vietnamese to lose the initiative to fight.<sup>250</sup> In short, it caused an over reliance on the Americans, and resulted in largely inadequate training equipping of the South Vietnamese military.

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<sup>246</sup> Id. at 554.

<sup>247</sup> Summers I at 168.

<sup>248</sup> Bergerund at 114.

<sup>249</sup> Summers I at 170.

<sup>250</sup> Hosman at 37.

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In addition to a lack of unity of command including the South Vietnamese, we lacked unity of command within our own American forces. Although General Westmoreland was the tactical commander, the air and naval decisions came out of Honolulu, and the majority of other decisions came out of Washington. As with the President and the JCS, these three entities also lacked any serious communication.<sup>251</sup> In reality, as Secretary of the Air Force Townsend Hoopes stated, “the US was fighting three separate loosely related struggles. There was the large scale conventional war, there was the confused ‘pacification’ effort, based upon political-sociological presumptions of astronomical proportions ... and there was the curiously remote air war against the North Vietnamese.”<sup>252</sup> In all of this it is important to remember that there was no strategic headquarters for the war in Vietnam.<sup>253</sup> We also had no single air commander. The 2d Air Division, the Saigon division that directly controlled the fighters that participated in Rolling Thunder, received orders from not only Pacific Command (PACOM) in Honolulu, but also from Pacific Air Force (PACAF). Additionally, 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force out of the Philippines had input in the air operations of the 2d Air Division.<sup>254</sup> These controls were obviously in addition to the whims of President Johnson, Mr. McNamara, and the Tuesday Lunches. Because of the lack of unity of command, it was virtually impossible to integrate Rolling Thunder with other air operations in South East Asia.<sup>255</sup> That is we could not really coordinate Rolling Thunder with other contemporary air operations. The lack of unity of command also led to squabbles between the services in Vietnam. The

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<sup>251</sup> Summers I at 148.

<sup>252</sup> Id. at 148.

<sup>253</sup> Schandler at 27.

<sup>254</sup> Clodfelter at 129.



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tension became competition between the Air force and the Navy. At times it was so bad that after Navy jets had launched from their carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin and flown to their target areas they would find that Air Force planes had already bombed the area.<sup>256</sup> This competition became so fierce that Lieutenant General Joseph Moore, 2d Air Division Commander, was ordered to create two separate zones for the Air Force and navy air operations. The services could only strike within the zone of the other with prior approval of the other service.<sup>257</sup> When it came down to actually executing a mission, the air crews were so restricted that they were forced to wait for the last minute changes coming from the White house, Hawaii, the Philippines, or Saigon.<sup>258</sup> Our lack of a unified command rested ultimately with the commander in Chief – President Johnson. As the man responsible for the United States Armed Forces, Johnson had the ability to create a unified command. The failure to do so is not surprising when you view the Administration's approach to the war. Because Johnson failed to set clear objectives or include his military leaders in military decisions, the entire war was fought in a haze of uncertainty. This was picked up on by the American people and the press. In May 1967, Newsweek referred to America's belief that this was the most ambiguous war in our history.<sup>259</sup> The lack of unified command prevented the US from being able to fully realize the success from operations that were undertaken. It was painfully obvious in Rolling Thunder, and was one of the reasons for its failure.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Id. at 129.

<sup>256</sup> Elliot at 45.

<sup>257</sup> Clodfelter at 130.

<sup>258</sup> McMaster at 222.

<sup>259</sup> Kosner at 31.

<sup>260</sup> Clodfelter at 128.

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Even during the successful Linebacker II campaign, unity of command was not all that it could have been. As Herman Gilters case study on the campaign showed, lack of a unified command structure continually hindered targeting during Linebacker II. Gilters feels that because a full range of weapon systems was available to the United States, the need for a single command was more apparent than ever before, the lack of which causing a less than optimum mix of aircraft and munitions.<sup>261</sup> We realized toward the end of the war the mistakes we had made. Nixon drastically changed the way in which decisions were made. Nixon had learned from the failures of the Johnson administration. Upon assuming the Presidency, he realized that the prolonged ground war had cost the will of the American people. Further, the North Vietnamese had stalled Nixon's early attempts at negotiation the President had decided to set a two part objective in Vietnam. First, cutting off the supply of the North Vietnamese troops so that they were no longer an immediate threat to the South. Second, Nixon wanted to send a message to the North Vietnamese that said 'settle or else'.<sup>262</sup> Nixon saw the previous administration's failure to utilize the expertise of the military leaders and saw the failed strategy that resulted. Nixon asked tasked his JCS with developing an operation that would be strong, threatening and effective.<sup>263</sup> The JCS developed a plan that would strike at war materials already in North Vietnam and war materials being distributed throughout Vietnam. They proposed striking railroads, roads, bridges, railroad yards, equipment repair facilities, POL storage areas, weapon storage areas and power plants.<sup>264</sup> The plan also called for

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<sup>261</sup> Schlight at 113.

<sup>262</sup> Clodfelter at 156.

<sup>263</sup> Id. at 157.

<sup>264</sup> Id. at 158.

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something that was never approved under Johnson, simultaneous attacks on different targets. Additionally, Nixon approved the JCS recommendation for striking enemy defenses.<sup>265</sup> This operation “Linebacker” was to run concurrently with the Navy operation “Pocket Money,” which was to mine the Haiphong harbor.<sup>266</sup> These were the same types of proposals that had been routinely rejected under the Johnson/McNamara Administration.

Nixon had learned that the gradual approach to bombing not only could not carry the will of the American people, who saw it as simply the needless damage to another country without any visible headway, but it also gave the North Vietnamese the opportunity to adapt.<sup>267</sup> The bitter lesson that you must give your military leaders the authority to fight the war in a way to win it was not lost on Nixon.<sup>268</sup> Nixon had decided to withdrawal our troops at the same pace as the South Vietnamese troops became stronger. The objective of this was to leave the South Vietnamese in charge of their war with an army that would be sufficient to defend its country on its terms.<sup>269</sup> The South Vietnamese were to prove themselves to be, at times, excellent fighters.

In April 1970, acting on recommendations from JCS, Nixon agreed to a joint US/South Vietnamese assault on North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia.<sup>270</sup> By successfully destroying these North Vietnamese sanctuaries, we were able to concentrate more US troops to training the South Vietnamese with out worry of constant strikes by

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<sup>265</sup> Id. at 158.

<sup>266</sup> Id. at 158.

<sup>267</sup> Nixon at 97.

<sup>268</sup> Id. at 100.

<sup>269</sup> Id. at 106.

<sup>270</sup> Id. at 120.

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the North Vietnamese.<sup>271</sup> The strikes in Cambodia were successful because the U.S. and the South Vietnamese were operating under a single command structure. President Nixon felt that by 1971 the South Vietnamese military was ready to take on cutting the Ho Chi Mihn Trail alone. Nixon felt that the only U.S. participation would be to provide equipment and air cover.<sup>272</sup> Further, by 1972 the South Vietnamese government had successfully consolidated the defense forces of their country and were conducting almost all of the fighting against the North Vietnamese.<sup>273</sup> Nixon had been determined not to repeat Johnson's failure in taking over the war. Nixon believed that the more the American troops fought the war for the South Vietnamese troops, especially in leadership positions, the weaker that the South Vietnamese would become.<sup>274</sup>

Obviously, all of the potential human assets were not used effectively in Vietnam. Johnson failed to properly use the indigenous peoples, both because of poor strategy and a lack of command unity. We know from the South Vietnamese military performance late in the war that with proper training and equipment, they could have been quite effective. Unfortunately, we did not adequately train the South Vietnamese military until it was late in the war. Additionally, once we turned the war over to the South Vietnamese, we left them virtually unarmed and unfunded. President Nixon believed that Congress prevented South Vietnam from being able to adequately defend itself by prohibiting the use of American air power in Vietnam, and by cutting our military aid to

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<sup>271</sup> Id. at 130.

<sup>272</sup> Id. at 136.

<sup>273</sup> Id. at 130.

<sup>274</sup> Id. at 135.

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Vietnam severely.<sup>275</sup> In fact, Nixon believed that due to the lack of U.S. equipment and funding being provided to Vietnam, they were weaker in 1973 than they were in 1968.<sup>276</sup> The lack of training and strategy for the use of the South Vietnamese precluded the ultimate success of their military. The lack of command unity precluded our joint success during the “American” stages of the war fighting.

**D. USE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE GULF WAR**

President Bush’s approach to the Gulf War was dynamically different from Johnson’s approach to Vietnam. Unlike Johnson, Bush properly utilized all forces that were at his disposal in the Gulf War, both through coalition warfare and unity of command. At the outset of the war, Bush knew that he would have to have United Nations support in order to ensure unity. Without the United Nations support, Bush was subject to the same worldwide criticism that faced Johnson. The major obstacle was the Soviet Union. Bush had worries that the Soviet Union would block United Nations action. Bush acted quickly to get the Soviet Union on board. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker started talking to the Soviet leaders on the day of the invasion, convincing the Soviets to join the U. S. in supporting Security Council Resolution 660, which condemned the Iraqi invasion and demanded immediate withdrawal.<sup>277</sup> The next day, Bush sent Baker to Moscow, where Baker and Edward Shevardnadze, Soviet Foreign Minister, issued a joint statement that condemned Iraq, and again demanded an immediate withdrawal. This statement also called for a worldwide embargo on the sale of military equipment to

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<sup>275</sup> Id. at 165.

<sup>276</sup> Id. at 166.

<sup>277</sup> John B. Hannah, *Soviet Contributions to the Coalition*, in *Friends in Need*, (Andrew Bennett ed., St Martins Press, New York, 1997) at page 243

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Iraq.<sup>278</sup> This was not only surprising because of the past strife between the U. S. and the Soviet Union, but also because Iraq has long relied on the Soviet Union for military and financial aid.<sup>279</sup> Bush knew that the Soviets could exercise a United Nations veto if prompt action wasn't taken and maintained. Bush also knew that the Security Council resolution was not the last time he would require the support of the Soviets. One month after the Iraq invasion, Bush met with Mikhail Gorbachev in Helsinki to discuss the Gulf crisis.<sup>280</sup> After this meeting, the U. S. declared that the U.S. and Soviets were "very reliable partners".<sup>281</sup> For the Soviet's part, they had pledged to support UN-approved military actions against Iraq.<sup>282</sup> The Soviets had supported the UN actions due, in large part, to the quick moves of President Bush. After obtaining the support of the Soviet Union, getting the support of the remainder of the UN was fairly easy. The Soviets did not add military or financial support to the Gulf War.<sup>283</sup> The support obtained by President Bush at the outset was as valuable as any other obtained throughout the war.

President Bush had set the standard for the coalition from the beginning. As soon as Bush had committed U.S. troops, it became fairly obvious that the United States would lead the coalition forces.<sup>284</sup> It was a brilliant calculation on Bush's part, but it was a gamble. He committed the American troops before any other country had committed money or troops. His actions had put pressure on other countries to do their part.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Id. at 243.

<sup>279</sup> Id. at 244.

<sup>280</sup> Graubard at 113.

<sup>281</sup> Id. at 113.

<sup>282</sup> Id. at 113.

<sup>283</sup> The Soviet Union did, however, provide military intelligence support to the coalition. Hannah at 247

<sup>284</sup> Bennett at 5.

<sup>285</sup> Id. at 5.

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Bush ran the risk that the other countries would do nothing and simply let the United States carry the burden. Fortunately, over forty other countries joined the coalition.<sup>286</sup> Whether they joined because they felt it was the right thing to do or because they felt that the American Congress would not allow a fight without the support of other countries we will never know. The threat was there however that had Bush not managed to obtain early support, Congress would not have supported the war. The fact remains that Bush not only put the U.S. in a position to enjoy the inputs of other countries, but also in the driver's seat of the coalition.

Bush set out early to gain the support from other countries. He sent Secretary Baker out as soon as our troops were committed. Baker was seeking not only military support, but financial support as well.<sup>287</sup> To ensure U. S. support, the countries in harm's way, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, contributed billions of dollars to fund America's military deployment.<sup>288</sup> Countries such as Germany and Japan, who could not contribute militarily, contributed financially. In the end, Bush had at his disposal the largest coalition of nations united since World War II.<sup>289</sup> After setting up the coalition, the question of how to maintain it remained.

As unlikely as the partnership between the U. S. and the Soviet Union was, the partnering of Arab states against Iraq, was just as unlikely. This is especially true when one considers the fact that in entering the coalition with the U. S. they were also entering

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<sup>286</sup> Id. at 9.

<sup>287</sup> Grabard at 111.

<sup>288</sup> Bennett at 13.

<sup>289</sup> Summers II at 231.

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into a partnership with Israel.<sup>290</sup> The strength of the coalition must have surprised Hussein. Especially after Israel, tired of Iraqi scud attacks threatened retaliation.<sup>291</sup>

Hussein underestimated not only the strength of the coalition but especially the diplomatic skills of President Bush. President Bush exhibited text book diplomacy in preventing Israel from retaliating against Iraq. Instead of letting the situation spin out of control, Bush immediately diverted planes from other missions to take out the scud launchers.<sup>292</sup> The President knew that the Arab countries would never allow themselves to be seen as an ally of Israel, and with an Israeli attack of Iraq, the coalition may have shattered.<sup>293</sup> This volatile situation called for delicate diplomacy. The Arab countries had to be appeased while still keeping Israel from entering into the war. Bush solved this problem by personally dealing with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, having the Air Force knock out the scud sites and keeping in constant contact with Saudi King Fahd.<sup>294</sup>

From the beginning of the Gulf crisis, Bush initiated a diplomatic operation that was as far reaching as the military operations. In fact, but for Bush's diplomatic strategy, the coalition may never have been cemented. Instead, Bush's ability in getting the Arab world on-line, and his later success in keeping the coalition together left Iraq without a friend. Keeping the coalition together was an incredible challenge, making it operational was just as challenging. The first decision was who would lead the coalition.

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<sup>290</sup> Id. at 237.

<sup>291</sup> Summers II at 236.

<sup>292</sup> Schwarzkopf at 481.

<sup>293</sup> Id. at 481.

<sup>294</sup> Id. at 482.



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As stated earlier, once the United States committed our troops, it was obvious that we would lead the coalition. The major issue was how to deal with the Saudis. Because we were operating out of Saudi Arabia, a respect for the sovereignty of that nation demanded an important role for the Saudi military leadership. Instead of taking over the war, as we did in Vietnam, Bush understood the importance of unity of command while preserving the host country's stake in the war.<sup>295</sup>

In order to allow for the accomplishment of both, the coalition was set up as a joint command. The Saudis and Americans would jointly control the military, however, the United States commander reserved final approval of all military operations.<sup>296</sup> In short, the Americans were in fact running the war. The coalition forces were united under General Schwarzkopf. While Prince Khalid was seen as Schwarzkopf's equal, in reality it was the American general who commanded all military missions.<sup>297</sup> The result of the coalition's unity of command was obvious when one considers the rapid success of a force made up of forty nations. But for a complete unity of command, the coalition forces could not have achieved the success that they eventually did. Bush allowed Schwarzkopf to "exercise the authority in making decisions that normal command functions would assign to a theater commander".<sup>298</sup> This is something that did not happen in Vietnam. Schwarzkopf, in turn, was careful to give the Arab units recognizable and meaningful roles in the ground campaign.<sup>299</sup> Additionally, Schwarzkopf got all of his different warriors to cooperate. Although the Arab units were

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<sup>295</sup> Id. at 434.

<sup>296</sup> Id. at 434.

<sup>297</sup> Summers II at 241.

<sup>298</sup> Summers II at 244.

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under Prince Khalid for command purposes, the fact that they had agreed to fall under and conform to U.S. operational plans allowed the coalition to devote its time to coordinating concurrent but separate operations under one major strategy.<sup>300</sup> Bush ensured that the coalition could adequately utilize all assets by allowing the military to fight the war.

### **E. USE OF RESERVES IN VIETNAM**

The final area in which President Johnson failed to utilize all assets at his disposal was in the area of Reserve and National Guard forces. Vietnam was the first war in American history that had no major mobilization of the Reserve components.<sup>301</sup> Johnson had relied on the draft to provide the large numbers of troops necessary to fight the war. Use of the draft brought with it the obvious problems. The government was forcing young men into the military who had no real desire to be in a peace-time military let alone in time of war. Why would Johnson decide not to use a group of men who had willingly joined the military? The answer reexamines some of the same reasons Johnson decided not to enlist the support of the American public.

From the earliest days of the war in Vietnam throughout out Johnson's presidency, there were numerous recommendations to the President to call-up the Reserves.<sup>302</sup> As early as 1965 there was a direct proposal from the military leaders to call-up the reserves.<sup>303</sup> Johnson decided that a recall would appear too "warlike" and that it would

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<sup>299</sup> Nye at 211.

<sup>300</sup> Id. at 205.

<sup>301</sup> Summers II at 68.

<sup>302</sup> Turner at 150.

<sup>303</sup> Id. at 224.

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detract attention from his social programs.<sup>304</sup> As stated earlier, Johnson had no intention of arousing public sentiment for the war. It was not until after Tet that Johnson seriously considered a Reserve call-up.<sup>305</sup> In that case, Johnson believed that the American people would not be supportive of such a measure. In fact, Johnson felt that the issue of a reserve call-up was *the* issue that would push the American people over the edge into declaring the war too costly.<sup>306</sup> Johnson chose not to recall the Reserves early in the war for fear that it would be too popular; he chose not to use the Reserves late in the war because it would be too unpopular.<sup>307</sup> In the end, Johnson's fear that the war would become too costly was realized. It wasn't, however, realized due to the Reserve issue. It was because of Johnson's continuous ambiguity in waging war. The symbol of the unpopularity of the war became the draft card. More and more Johnson was faced with the protesters burning their draft cards and otherwise protesting the draft.<sup>308</sup> How Johnson failed to realize the enormous unpopularity of the draft and how the Reserve forces could have helped defies logic. Even McNamara proposed a Reserve call-up of 235,000 troops in early 1965.<sup>309</sup> Johnson refused this proposal. Johnson had planned to test the waters with the American people on the reserve issue. In 1965, Johnson and McNamara hinted to the press that there might be a reserve call-up.<sup>310</sup> Additionally, they had planned to make a speech announcing a mobilization to test the public's reaction. Ultimately, Johnson, fearing that the nation's call for war would have grown too strong,

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<sup>304</sup> Id. at 224.

<sup>305</sup> Id. at 224.

<sup>306</sup> Summers I at 119.

<sup>307</sup> Wells at 42.

<sup>308</sup> Marvin Gettleman, *Vietnam and America*, 293 (Grove Press, New York, 1985).

<sup>309</sup> Schandler at 28.

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decided not to make the speech.<sup>311</sup> This pro-war sentiment, Johnson thought, would kill the Great Society.

Because of Johnson's dual fears of pro and anti-war sentiment, the reserves were not called-up under Johnson. The potential impact of utilizing this asset can't be over-estimated. General Schwarzkopf felt strongly about calling-up the Reserves in Vietnam. He stated, "one of the terrible mistakes we'd made during the Vietnam War was not mobilizing – Washington sent our soldiers into battle without calling on the American people to support them."<sup>312</sup> General Schwarzkopf felt that mobilization of the reserves sent a message to the country that the war was a job for the entire nation, not just the military.<sup>313</sup> President Nixon echoed this thought. He felt that Johnson failed to marshal a concerted plan for the war in Vietnam that brought in the American people. Nixon believed that a good way to do this was by calling up the reserves.<sup>314</sup> In effect, Nixon was stating that the failure to call-up the reserves went hand in hand with Johnson's intent to not alarm the country.

The failure to call-up the reserves removed hundreds of thousands of potential soldiers from a dwindling pool of manpower and left the military without all of their resources. The loss was more than a loss of numbers. Although we can't gage all of the impact that the Reserves would have had in Vietnam, we certainly know the effect they had in the Gulf War.

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<sup>310</sup> Wells at 40.

<sup>311</sup> Id. at 41.

<sup>312</sup> Schwarzkopf at 375.

<sup>313</sup> Id. at 375.

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**F. USE OF RESERVES IN THE GULF WAR**

In the Gulf War, President Bush immediately sought to mobilize the reserves. This accomplished several key objectives for the President. First, it did provide numbers. In January 1991, the standing military of the United States was made up, in large part, of reservists. For example, 58% of the Army, 31% of the Air Force, 29% of Navy and Marine Corps, and 32% of the Coast Guard were reservists.<sup>315</sup> With respect to specific job skills, 86% of Army heavy equipment maintenance units were reservists, as were 74% of POL companies, 69% of hospital units, 64% of Military police units, 62% of ammunition companies, and 58% of truck companies.<sup>316</sup> Without the Reserves, the Army would not have been able to fix a tank, fill a tank, stitch a wound, keep the peace, reload a weapon, or re-supply. The Air Force wouldn't have been in any better shape without their reservists. In the Gulf War, Reserve Wings provided 59% of theater airlift aircraft.<sup>317</sup> Additionally, 22% of refueling aircraft, 93% of aeromedical evacuation aircrews, and 71% of aerial port units were provided by the reserves.<sup>318</sup> These numbers are especially important when viewed with an eye toward what General Schwarzkopf requested when Bush first mobilized the reserves. Knowing he was going to have to start from scratch in the desert, Schwarzkopf said, "I knew precisely what we needed: truck drivers, stevedores, ammunition handlers, telephone installers, mechanics – workers to

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<sup>314</sup> Nixon at 78.

<sup>315</sup> Summers II at 73.

<sup>316</sup> Id. at 73.

<sup>317</sup> Id. at 73.

<sup>318</sup> Id. at 73.

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take on the nitty-gritty tasks of supporting a deployment into a combat zone.”<sup>319</sup> Again, the importance of the Reserves was not simply one of numbers or strong backs.

The fact these “citizen soldiers” were deployed gave the entire country a stake in the war. Better stated in General Schwarzkopf’s words, it was the country fighting the country’s war. By mobilizing the Reserves and the National Guard, Bush placed every community into the war. The mobilization built a bridge between the nation and the military, because as the numbers show, the nation was the military. Certainly anyone who can remember the Gulf War will remember the ubiquitous yellow ribbons, the patriotic songs at every public event, and of course the “I support our troops” signs and bumper stickers.<sup>320</sup> During the Gulf War, they really were “our” troops. In an ABC poll conducted on 18 January 1991, 83% of those Americans polled supported the war and 71% strongly disapproved of anti-war protesters.<sup>321</sup> There is a very good reason why such a large percentage of America disapproved of the protesters. Again, Bush’s enlisting the will of the America played into the support of the war. The mobilization of the Reserves prevented the outcry that Johnson faced in Vietnam. During Vietnam, anti-war protesters were given an easily identifiable symbol of their outrage – the draft. Spouting the battle cry that Johnson was sending young men off to war against their will, the protesters brought the draft card into their protests. This could hardly be said of the reservists. They had voluntarily joined the military. Protests against the Gulf War were infrequent and not widely supported.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Schwarzkopf at 375.

<sup>320</sup> Graubard at 137.

<sup>321</sup> Summers II at 19.

<sup>322</sup> Summers II at 16.

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The all-volunteer force in the Gulf War took away one of the bullets that the protesters frequently utilized during Vietnam. To the American people, the Gulf War could only have appeared to be a war being fought by those who chose to be in the armed forces. General Fred Weyland remarked in 1973 that, "the American Army really is a people's Army in that the sense that it belongs to the American people... In the final analysis, the American Army is not so much an arm of the Executive branch as it is an arm of the American people."<sup>323</sup>

Mobilizing the Reserves was the last of many lessons that George Bush learned from the Vietnam War. It was the last in the many ties that bound the American people to the prosecution of the war. It provided manpower and the emotional push to allow a successful effort. Both were sorely needed in Vietnam, and could have been provided by a similar mobilization.

It must be stated that although this paper has focused on the negative aspects of the military in Vietnam, there were a great many success stories as far as the military was concerned. As stated earlier, some of the test and training programs utilizing the South Vietnamese were very effective but were simply abandoned before they could make any real gains. The South Vietnamese could have become nearly self-sufficient as a ground army with a little more U.S. assistance. As far as the U.S. military was concerned, they performed in an outstanding manner. As stated earlier, with superior firepower, the U.S. won every major engagement with the North Vietnamese. Had Johnson followed the advice of the JCS at the outset of the war, Vietnam could have

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<sup>323</sup> Fred Weyland as quoted in Summers II at 10.

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turned out much differently. Johnson ignored the JCS recommendation to train the South Vietnamese to become self-sufficient. Rather, the CIDG, CORDS and pacification programs were all given up on before they could reap any real benefits. Additionally, requests to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong, and to mine Haiphong harbor to cut off much needed supplies were rejected by Johnson and McNamara throughout the war. Although those measures were never employed *to win*, they were employed to get the North Vietnamese to negotiate. These measures accomplished their objectives within days. It must be realized that these objectives were quite different, but they also occurred much later in the war. Had Johnson done in 1965 what Nixon did at the end of the war, the war could have been won.

### **VII. CONCLUSION**

Fifty-eight thousand American servicemen lost their lives in Vietnam. America lost its innocence and its status in world affairs. The war had taken America from a post World War II super power position, to a position of paper tiger. Although still a powerful nation, America did not command the respect that it did prior to the war in Vietnam. This lack of respect would haunt America in foreign affairs until the Gulf War. In addition to the loss of national status, the President and the military of the United States suffered from a post Vietnam identity crisis. As stated earlier, the president who once commanded automatic respect, was now a target for abuse and degradation. Additionally, returning veterans, once met with parades and salutes, were treated worse than criminals. They were viewed as murderers and burn-outs, they were spit at and taunted. A generation of brave young men, who sacrificed their youth, was treated with



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utmost disdain upon their return, and a nation we had obligated ourselves to help in a time of need was left at the mercy of an enemy bent on their destruction. This is probably one of the most embarrassing chapters in America's history. All of this because we lost a war that we should have won. The question that has been asked time and time again is why did we lose?

The answer is not easy. It is easier to determine what didn't lose the war. First, the military didn't lose the war. Although operating without strategy or objective, our military didn't lose a major battle during Vietnam. The troops fought bravely, and the equipment functioned adequately. Our military leaders pushed Johnson early in the war for a strategy that later proven effective when utilized by Nixon. Had Johnson mined the harbors, appropriately trained the South Vietnamese and fully utilized U.S. airpower, the war could have been won. The loss can't be blamed on the military. Second, the American people didn't lose the war. In fact, they were never invited to join the war. Because of Johnson's strategy the people never had a role. The loss can't be blamed on the American people. In the final analysis, the loss in Vietnam can only be attributed to our leadership. The leadership of America made many mistakes in Vietnam. From the use of hardware to a pathetic air war strategy, the war was botched. An eminently winnable war was thrown away. This paper has examined only a few of the many mistakes made by the Johnson Administration. President Johnson failed to engage the American public, failed to control the American press, failed to include the military leadership in the war, and failed to properly utilize the personnel assets at his disposal. For the most part, these weren't based upon the failure to make a decision, instead,

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Johnson made a decision to approach the war in a certain way, and was reluctant to change. Probably his greatest mistake was putting stock in the advice of Robert S. McNamara. McNamara's decisions were, almost to the one, flawed. From his basic lack of military experience to his egotistical exclusion of the JCS, McNamara could have only earned defeat. The ultimate responsibility, however, lies at the feet of Johnson as Commander-in-Chief. He was simply the wrong President for the war.

On the other hand, President George Bush showed how America could hit on all cylinders in the prosecution of a war. Everything fell into place during the Gulf War. From the President, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the JCS to the American people, everyone was on the team. It was a much different war from Vietnam, but the basic principles remain in all wars. War will always require that the public support the effort, that positive messages come from the leaders, that all assets be properly utilized, and that the military be allowed to fight the war to win. George Bush was the right President for the Gulf War. He, and the American people, had learned the lessons from the war in Vietnam, and were determined not to repeat the mistakes. Bush's words upon the end of the Gulf war summed it up best when he said, "By God, we've licked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."<sup>324</sup> Hopefully, we have taken these lessons to heart.

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<sup>324</sup> Summers II at 7.