The Best and the Brightest Study Guide

The Best and the Brightest by David Halberstam

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The Best and the Brightest by David Halberstam is the story of the Vietnam war. It is an in-depth analysis of how the whole situation in Vietnam developed from the days of French imperialism. He examines the factors that contributed to the situation that developed into the Vietnam War. French colonialism was the primary factor that set the stage for Vietnam. At the peace talks at the end of World War II, the big concern was Europe and not Indochina. The peace conference allowed the French to return to Indochina and the result was almost immediate conflict.

Instead of the French leaving Indochina, they remained and the longer they remained, the graver the situation became. The United States misread the situation in China and Indochina. China fell because the Americans failed to support Chiang Kai Shek at the end. With China in the hands of Communist Mao, the situation in Indochina deteriorated. A neutral government was negotiated for Laos and the situation in Vietnam worsened. Eventually the French asked for American assistance. President Kennedy sent in American advisors, which was the beginning of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

The problem was caused by the U.S. ignoring the history of the people in Indochina and thinking that they were motivated by factors that were unimportant to them. First the French and then the Americans would not let them decide their own destiny. This was the real cause of the problems. The Americans viewed the problem in terms of the domino theory; if one country fell, then the other countries in Southeast Asia would also fall under the influence of communist domination.

The book covers a lot of ground with a myriad of dialogues and examinations of the different positions. There is a lot of discussion of meetings and reports and what was and was not covered in them. The positions of the various players in the different administrations are presented as well as the public stances for political reasons. There is also talk of the misrepresenting of statistics by various entities to cover the true situation of the deterioration that was taking place and of the failure of various programs in South Vietnam.

Halberstam's book shows the depth of his research and indicates the amount of interviewing he did for the book. The Best and the Brightest is written in an objective and factual manner, even though it is lengthy. He covers the topic thoroughly and it is a good book for people wanting to know the story of Vietnam and how the United States became involved in Indochina.

Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

"A cold day in December. Long afterward, after the assassination and all the pain, the older man would remember with great clarity the younger man's grace, his good manners, his capacity to put a visitor at ease. He was concerned about the weather, that the old man not be exposed to the cold or to the probing questions of freezing newspapermen, that he not have to wait for a cab. Instead he had guided his guest to his own car and driver. The older man would remember the young man's good manners almost as clearly as the substance of their talk, though it was an important meeting," (Chapter 1, p. 9).

The book opens with a meeting that takes place at President-elect Kennedy's Georgetown townhouse. Kennedy is in the process of putting together an administration for his first term as President and the short opening chapter provides insight into the magnamity of the task faced by the young President-elect. He needed to find experts in different areas and had just concluded a meeting with Robert A. Lovett, the old man referred to in the above quote. He was the link to previous eras and Kennedy was seeking his advice. His father, Joseph P. Kennedy had suggested Lovett for the position at the State Department.

Lovett had been an investment banker before entering government. He was named Undersecretary of State in 1947 and Secretary of Defense in 1950. Lovett was instrumental in policy making during the Marshall Plan and Cold War years. He represented the Establishment. Kennedy wanted him to hold a post in his administration and told him he could have State, Defense or Treasury. Lovett did not feel he should take a position because of health problems.

Lovett and Kennedy discussed candidates for the various positions. Lovett recommended Dean Rusk for the position of Secretary of State and Robert McNamara for Secretary of Defense, men who Kennedy eventually selected for posts in his administration.

The meeting between Kennedy and Lovett was reported in the newspapers. Some people felt reassured that the young President-elect was aware of his shortcomings and inexperience and was consulting the right people. To many of the old timers that had followed Eleanor Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson, Kennedy represented the new breed. He did not want to continue the kind of Cold War policies that previous administrations that previous administrations had followed.

Kennedy tapped the skills of Chester Bowles to advise him on foreign policy issues during the campaign. He was a good liberal that bridged the gap with the Democratic Party Establishment and clung to many of the policies of the 1930s. He believed that hunger and poverty were more serious problems than those communism posed. Even

though the Kennedy team was at first attracted to Bowles, their new breed was not happy about Bowles' old views from the thirties.

Bowles' popularity with the Kennedy camp began to fade before the nominating convention. Bowles was a Hubert Humphrey Democrat and he refused to campaign against Humphrey in the Midwest primaries. At the convention, Bowles worked on the platform, but by that time he was distanced from the Kennedy people. Kennedy did not need the liberals as much after he accepted the nomination.

Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the old-time Party establishment members who did not wholeheartedly trust Kennedy. They could not work out their differences. She wanted him to name Adlai Stevenson as his Secretary of State which Kennedy was not willing to do. He wanted to distance his administration from the Dulles years.

Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

Kennedy had decided early on to act as his own Secretary of State. He was well educated and well read and had served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kennedy was not as well known in Washington prior to the 1960 race. He was always traveling out of town. He became well-known after receiving the nomination and by mid-campaign was filled with confidence. He had the support of most of the press led by reporters Walter Lippmann and James Reston.

Kennedy did not favor Adlai Stevenson. He looked upon him as being indecisive and would not have him in the Secretary of State position. At one point in the campaign, Kennedy would have offered him the position in exchange for his support before the convention, but Stevenson wavered and would not make the deal. Stevenson wanted the Presidential nomination for himself and Kennedy offered the job to Dean Rusk.

Kennedy had considered other men for the position. J. William Fulbright had worked with Kennedy on the Foreign Relations Committee but he did not have the support of the Negroes or Jews and Kennedy did not want to alienate them. McGeorge Bundy was also considered but he was a Republican and as young as Kennedy. David K.E. Bruce, another candidate, was felt to be too old and they did not think he could present himself well on the Hill. They were basically looking for someone who had made the fewest mistakes and offended the fewest of people.

Dean Rusk was liked by everyone. He also let it be known through channels that he was interested in the job. The Kennedy team did a brief background check on Rusk and invited him for a talk with Kennedy. Rusk did not feel that the talk went well. When Rusk was offered the job, they had to talk about finances since Rusk had two divorces and had just bought a new house in Riverdale. He was not wealthy but was given a good termination allowance by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Chester Bowles was Rusk's Undersecretary of State. Rusk would never really fit in with the Kennedy team and he would always feel like the outsider. He also had communications problems with the President.

"It was a glittering time. They literally swept into office, ready, moving, generating their style, their confidence—they were going to get America moving again. There was a sense that these were brilliant men, men of force, not cruel, not harsh, but men who acted rather than waited. There was no time to wait, history did not permit that luxury; if we waited it would all be past us. Everyone was going to Washington, and the word went out quickly around the Eastern seacoast, at the universities and in the political clubs, that the best men were going to Washington. Things were going to be done and it was going to be great fun; the challenge awaited and these men did not doubt their capacity in answer that challenge," (Chapter 4, p. 50).

There was a great deal of excitement and anticipation about the new administration. The Kennedy group had a good image with the public. Instead of parties, they preferred small dinner parties within their own group. They were an intellectual group of people who liked poetry. In many ways, even Vice-President Lyndon Johnson was an outsider and a part of the Eisenhower era. However, Johnson was impressed with the men when he first met them.

The Kennedy team represented elitism and a new kind of American nationalism. McGeorge Bundy had the position of Special Assistant to the President for National Security and Walt Whitman Rostow had a position in the White House. Bundy would be the one to handle Rostow. Kennedy liked the intellectual stimulation provided by Bundy, who was also popular on the social circuit. He also had a few run-ins with people and was known to put them down.

Bundy had a respectable pedigree and history. Descended from the New England Lowells, he was educated at Groton and Yale and served in the Army during the Second World War. After the war he worked on the Marshall Plan and then as a political analyst for the Council on Foreign Relations. He then became a lecturer in government at Harvard during the 1950s where he was happy and popular with the students. He was awarded tenure without ever taking any graduate courses.

Bundy was effective in whatever he did because he had the ability to sense what others wanted and needed and what they were thinking. He was an effective administrator when he joined the Kennedy team in Washington.

Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary and Analysis

In spite of all the excitement and anticipation of the new administration, 1961 was not a good year for the Kennedy team. Kennedy won the election by a very narrow margin of one hundred thousand votes. This was not the mandate that they had hoped for. There were the issues of missiles, China policy and civil rights. There were also many problems in 1961 including the Bay of Pigs, the escalation of problems in Laos, the arms race and problems in the Congo and Viet Nam. The Bay of Pigs was the situation that had the greatest effect on the balance of the Kennedy administration.

Dean Rusk was not in favor of the invasion that most of the team supported. Bowles opposed the invasion and this brought him into conflict with the administration. The fact was that the United States did pay attention to the fact that the Cuban people were not opposed to Castro. This was the big mistake, not the publicized one of the failure to provide air support.

Bowles not only opposed the Bay of Pigs invasion, he also opposed intervention in the Dominican Republic. This brought him into direct conflict with Bobby Kennedy, since the President and Rusk were out of town. Bowles contacted the President and was told that he, Bowles, was in charge since he was the high-ranking man in the President's absence. A few months later, Bowles was given another position.

Another issue during this time was the escalating arms race. There was a move for disarmament that was not too popular with the administration. Kennedy was interested in showing that he was tough to Khrushchev and the Soviets. He felt that he had been bullied by the Soviets at the summit meeting in Vienna and was intent on showing that he could deal with them, despite his young age. Kennedy confided what happened at the meeting to Reston and said he did not understand why Khrushchev attacked in the way that he did.

In response to the meeting, Kennedy increased military spending and strengthened U.S. troops in Berlin. He also figured that the only place he could prove his credibility to Khrushchev was in Vietnam. Kennedy ordered eighteen thousand troops sent to Vietnam in an advisory and supply role. The Kennedy administration's eagerness to prove themselves to Khrushchev actually escalated the Cold War.

Vietnam was not the result of a thought out policy. The situation more or less evolved as a result of the Cold War and the battle against communism. Most of the emphasis, especially at Potsdam, was on Europe and Indochina was divided between Japan and China at Yalta. This set the scene for the later problems in the region. The French were allowed to return to the area and establish their presence in Vietnam.

During World War II, the Japanese used Vietnam as a gateway to other areas. At this time, Asia was considered to be of secondary importance to Europe and stopping the Japanese was not yet considered vital to the situation in Europe. Although President Roosevelt had not favored the French presence in Asia, he had no specific post-war plans to prevent their return. After his death in 1945, there was no opposition to the French plans to return to Indochina.

The French returned to Vietnam after the war and both the United States and the French ignored their own lower level political officers telling them that there would be trouble. There was some pressure from the U.S. State Department for the French to negotiate to give the Vietnamese their independence. Tension in Vietnam mounted during 1946 as the French reneged on an initial agreement and the war began.

As the tension in Indochina mounted, the first confrontation occurred in Laos. Kennedy had been advised by Eisenhower before the inauguration of the possibility of war in Indochina. Eisenhower felt that if Laos fell to the communists, all of Indochina would follow. The Laotian people were not interested in world affairs but the U.S. felt the need to find a good leader for the country. The CIA was already active in the area, running the local airline. The Laotian military leader was General Phoumi Nosavan, who had profited off of the Cold War, but did not impress the Kennedy administration. The ruler of Laos was Prince Souvanna Phouma.

The Laotian ruler had tried to steer a neutral course in the post-World War II year but was undermined by the U.S. This eventually forced the Laotians into the camp of the communist Pathet Lao. Souvanna had fled from Laos a month before Kennedy took office. There was no neutral government and the crisis period began and would recur in the coming years as Souvanna's army refused to fight the Pathet Lao. The Kennedy administration considered an intervention in April 1961.

Harriman was sent to represent the United States in a meeting with Souvanna held at the New Delhi airport. He felt that Souvanna was worth supporting and was sent by Kennedy to a peace conference in Geneva in May. The purpose was to negotiate a Laotian settlement. They negotiated a neutral government and thus avoided U.S. military engagement in Laos.

They were able to achieve a negotiated settlement because neither Phoumi, nor Souphanuvong, the leader of the Pathet Lao, were organized and strong. This was not the same situation as in Vietnam were the Vietcong guerillas were more organized and determined. They had been fighting for more than fifteen years to unify the North and the South.

Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary and Analysis

"Yet if there was a problem with the pragmatism of the period, it was that there were simply too many foreign policy problems, too many crises, each crowding the others, demanding to be taken care of in that instant. There was too little time to plan, to think; one could only confront the most immediate problems and get rid of them piecemeal but as quickly as possible, or at least postpone any action. Long-range solutions, thoughtful changes, would have to wait, at least until the second term," (Chapter 7, p. 128).

The world situation resulted in a more or less irrational foreign policy for the Kennedy administration. He wanted to work on the China policy but there was never time. Rusk did not want a new China policy and Kennedy did not have the time to formulate one. This was to affect their policy in Southeast Asia because they did not look seriously at China during this period and this eventually led to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The communist associations of Ho Chi Minh were known in 1946.

The two events that affected U.S. perceptions were the escalation of the Cold War and the fall of China. Added to this were the Korean War and the McCarthy era. Everybody was united about the need to fight communism but dissented about the best way of doing so. Some wanted to battle the communist menace by use of military force; others wanted to use economic aid.

The key years were 1947 and 1948. The communists won a coup in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin blockade took place. The Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe began as did the Truman Doctrine of containment of communism. The theories and policies proposed by George Kennan, a statesman and analyst at the Soviet embassy in Moscow, were exploited and used as the bases for expanded militarization. The Truman administration developed a very hard-nosed attitude on communism and the fall of China in 1949 meant that the French could not win in Indochina.

The United States did not give military assistance to Chiang at the end to fight Mao and China fell. Joseph Alsop wrote a series of articles criticizing the U.S. for not supporting Chiang. The three articles were published in the Saturday Evening Post which was a powerful magazine at the time and alleged that there was a conspiracy involved.

Senator Joe McCarthy of Wisconsin was looking for an issue to excite the voters. He latched on to the issue of communism and more specifically, communists in the government. He gave speeches about communists in the State Department and talked about spy rings and produced long lists of names, smearing many innocent people. The McCarthy era ended in 1954, having lasted about four years, when he was censured by the Senate.

The effects of the Chinese revolution and the McCarthy era, plus the Korean War, were to make the United States take a more rigid stance against communism. Instead of viewing the situation in Vietnam as a colonial war, it was viewed as a war against communism.

The policy of rigid anti-communism continued after the fall of China and the end of the McCarthy era. There was a schism between China and Russia but this did not affect U.S. policy. The President was a believer in the domino theory. At one point the administration took a speech of Khrushchev's as a challenge and a fascination with guerrilla warfare began. In addition, the administration thought it could sway the underdeveloped world with technology.

In Vietnam, fighting began between the French and the Vietminh after the French return in 1946. The Vietnamese people were opposed to both of them and when the French attacked in the countryside, the people joined the Vietminh. The fighting continued until 1954 when Ngo Dinh Diem became President. By 1960 the Vietminh were waging a guerrilla war in the countryside and were now known as the Vietcong.

When Brigadier General Edward Lansdale wrote a report supporting Diem and recommended a team of civilian and military advisors, it ended up on Rostow's desk. The President was not eager to send Americans to Vietnam since they had just concluded the Bay of Pigs, but he eventually approved 400 Special Forces and three thousand military advisors. On March 15, 1961, Frederick E. Nolting, Jr. was named ambassador to Vietnam. Nolting was the kind of person who got along well with Diem and his appointment represented a commitment to Diem.

In April 1961, Vice President Johnson traveled to a number of Asian countries. He had to be persuaded by the President to stop in Vietnam. Johnson was to find out if Diem wanted troops sent in. Diem did not since the Vietnamese people would not want it after the French. Diem also felt it would indicate a sign of personal weakness on his part.

The French began to request military help from the U.S. in 1954. Before the talks at Geneva, the French had planned to set a trap for the Vietminh at Dienbienphu. In setting the trap, the French made the error leaving the high ground to the Vietminh, believing that they had no artillery. The result was that the French were trapped and were pressuring for the U.S. to enter the war. Eisenhower was not in favor of committing U.S. troops, since he felt that Truman had erred in sending troops to Korea.

There was a lot of Congressional opposition when the Defense Department sent forty fighters and two hundred technicians to Indochina in February 1954 and they were withdrawn by June because of the uproar. By April the Eisenhower administration was looking for a congressional resolution to send naval and air power to assist the French at Dienbienphu. If Congress granted the authority, the U.S. would require a larger mobilization than they had in Korea since ground troops would be required after the air strikes.

A few days after the opening of the Geneva Conference, Dienbienphu fell and the United States decided not to intervene. The Geneva Conference resulted in the division of the country into North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh, and South Vietnam, led by Ngo Dinh Diem. U.S. advisors were sent in September to assist the French without any taint of colonialism. They were now fighting communism.

Diem survived the first few years because there was no serious challenge from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. Diem became embittered and neurotic as time went on but the United States remained committed to him. The problem was that Diem had little contact with the peasants and little that the United States did reached the peasants so the Vietcong grew stronger. They did most of their recruitment at night. As the pressures mounted, Diem turned more and more to the U.S. for help. In 1961, the Vietcong began to escalate their efforts. In October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended sending forty thousand troops to Vietnam, and another one hundred twenty eight thousand if the Chinese intervened.

In September 1961, John McCone was appointed as head of the CIA. This did not sit well with the liberals since McCone was a conservative whose protection Kennedy felt that he needed.

Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary and Analysis

Kennedy sent his own representatives to Vietnam in October 1961 to report on the situation. They included Rostow and Maxwell Taylor. "The resulting Taylor-Rostow report would significantly deepen the American involvement in Vietnam from the low-level (and incompetent) advisory commitment of the Eisenhower years (geared up for a traditional border-crossing war that would never come) to the nearly 20,000 support and advisory troops there at the time President Kennedy was killed. It was one of the crucial turning points in the American involvement, and Kennedy, by his very choice of the two men who had the greatest vested interest in fighting some kind of limited antiguerrilla war, had loaded the dice," (Chapter 9, p. 193).

Rostow supported an aggressive anti-communist policy in Vietnam. He favored strategic bombing and a confrontation with the communist North. Taylor was Kennedy's military analyst. Lansdale was also included in the group. There were some personality conflicts in the group, basically between Lansdale and Taylor. Lansdale developed a list of issues that he thought were relevant for the trip and found them ignored by Taylor. Also included in the group was columnist Joseph Alsop.

The Vietcong were intensifying their activities and challenging the government forces at this time. The Vietcong were committed to their cause and had good leadership. The government forces were poorly trained with inexperienced leaders. As the Vietcong grew stronger, Diem asked for U.S. help. He did not feel that SEATO could provide adequate protection for Vietnam and wanted a bilateral defense treaty with the U.S. His Acting Defense Minister, Nguyen Dinh Thuan, requested American troops in October.

There were three plans that the Americans were considering. The first was to send three divisions of troops to fight to defeat the Vietcong. The second was the symbolic gesture of sending fewer troops just to have a presence in Vietnam. The last was to increase U.S. assistance and support.

As a result of the fact-finding mission, the Rowtow-Taylor report advocated the use of troops in Vietnam. Taylor recommended a minimum of 8,000 troops. Taylor believed that if the U.S. showed that it was serious, Hanoi would not contest them. This was an incorrect assumption on Taylor's part and one that would be repeated often in the coming years.

Kennedy did not favor sending troops to Vietnam. Neither did Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs George Ball. Ball had worked with the French and knew of the intense nationalistic views of the Vietnamese people. He advised that the Taylor plan could not work and would lead to a rapid commitment of troops in the coming years. Kennedy did not authorize the use of troops at this time but told the Pentagon to prepare for the possibility in the future. In December, he did increase the number of

advisors instead of withdrawing the ones that were already there. This set the stage for increased involvement in the future.

In January, Paul Harkins was named to head the U.S. command in Saigon. In the future, Harkins would file unrealistic reports about the situation in Vietnam.

The American advisors were sent despite the intelligence reports which warned that the war was political and that the Diem regime was not healthy. In spite of this, the U.S. continued to support the regime with Diem agreeing to implement political and social changes in the country. Diem resented the interference in his country's domestic affairs that the U.S. requirements imposed and immediately began to renege on them since part of the package involved his brother and sister-in-law. The Americans backed down on their demand for reforms. Due to this, the real problems that existed in the nation, the problems in the countryside, continued.

Nhu was given responsibility for the hamlet program. The program was supposed to protect the peasants and help develop loyalty to the government. Nhu, who did not trust the Americans, ran the program as his own powerbase. The Americans did not achieve the modernization and effects that they wanted. The American presence was based on trusting Diem, not criticizing him and correcting his mistakes.

When Hawkins arrived in Vietnam, he had little knowledge of its history or the kind of war he was about to get involved in. He believed that there was a difference between the French and the American presence. The French wanted to stay in Vietnam; the Americans wanted to return to their own country, leaving a free Vietnam. The Americans had the fire power and the will that the French had lacked. Hawkins described himself as an optimist, but his optimism led to the understating and downplaying the strength and capabilities of the Vietcong.

In October 1961, there were major changes made at the State Department in what became known as the Thanksgiving Day Massacre. Chester Bowles was relieved of his duties and Averell Harriman was named Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern affairs. Harriman immediately began to implement changes that would eventually bring him into conflict with the Vietnam policy that the Kennedy administration had already embarked on.

Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary and Analysis

The commitment of U.S. advisors made Vietnam an important country to the U.S. government. The government was now dependent on the reports it received from the military. Harkins sent reports that reassured them. Nobody checked the reports that the government was receiving. The soldiers on the line were opposed to this false reporting because it endangered their lives. This resulted in an effort to repress the dissent, unknown to Washington. There was conflict and tension now between Harkins and his people in the Mekong Delta and at one point, Harkins wanted to fire one of them but was told there would be too many political repercussions. The official view in the Pentagon was that Harkins was obeying the orders of Taylor.

Eventually, the White House staff tried to limit the military. They were opposed to one another on the use of napalm, defoliants, the use of jets and the free fire zones. This was viewed by many to be the use of excessive power even though it was favored by Diem and Nhu. Both were more anti-communistic than the population was.

The military at first lost the battle on jets so they pushed hard for the other items. Napalm, they felt, scared the Vietcong but Kennedy was appalled by what it did to people. Defoliation resulted in the destruction of crops and Kennedy would not allow that. Kennedy finally allowed the limited use of both in non-populated areas. The free fire zones allowed bombers to drop their unused bombs which made a return flight safer for them. Kennedy, who favored dropping them in the sea, eventually authorized the limited use of the free fire zones.

It began to appear to the White House that the management in Saigon was more committed to Diem than to Washington. They were certainly more militant than the people in Washington. There was also a lot of disagreement within the administration. McNamara, who was Secretary of Defense, was a dominant figure in the fray. He started making frequent trips to Vietnam to gain firsthand information, trying to protect the President in the process. By the late 1960s, under President Johnson, McNamara knew that his policies were a failure and that his days at Defense were limited. McNamara remained loyal to the Kennedy family long after President Kennedy's death.

While at Ford, McNamara was able to raise the quality of the auto product without raising the cost. This was one of his specialties and he implemented his plan by use of a bonus system to those who developed plans geared toward achieving his goals of cost effectiveness. McNamara emerged as the Whiz Kid of the organization. There was some conflict and people who were against him in the organization but he overcame them. Many of these same people were relieved when he went to Washington.

Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

McNamara was prepared when he took over Defense. He had studied and identified the problems at the Pentagon. He recruited people from academia and other places to serve under him. By this time it was known that there was no missile gap. In terms of the arms race, he learned that in order to argue against nuclear weapons, he had to make good arguments for conventional weapons. The United States had to have some arms strength. He was trying to change U.S. thinking on nuclear policy. Since the split between Russia and China, the communist threat was not as great because there was no united communist entity.

"Yet even his enemies added to his reputation; they were the right enemies, the generals, the conservatives on the Hill. And if there were doubts about his sensitivity on some political issues, even his liberal critics found something admirable in him, his capacity to change, to follow the evidence and to keep his ego separated from his opinions. So as the Kennedy Administration progressed he seemed to have started a career as the classic Secretary of Defense, particularly working for a President of the United States who was wiser, whose political instincts were better and more sophisticated. The combination of Kennedy-McNamara seemed to work well," (Chapter 13, p. 302). McNamara learned from talking to people. This tactic helped him to develop a base of knowledge on which to base his decisions.

In May 1963, the problems with the Buddhist monks began. The Buddhists represented a potent force in the population and many dissident groups rallied around them. As the Buddhist crisis intensified, a fact finding mission was casting doubts on Diem's regime and his ability to handle the situation. Many non-military people in Washington began to take a more pessimistic view of the situation in Vietnam. By mid-1963, Kennedy was supporting a nuclear test-ban treaty and was becoming disillusioned with the situation in Vietnam.

Even though Diem negotiated a weak agreement with the Buddhists in June, it reneged on many of the concessions and by July, plots were forming against the regime. The Diem government mounted a bloody raid on the pagodas, and tried to cover it up, blaming it on the Army. The truth became known within forty-eight hours and it destroyed any chance for a settlement.

In Washington and in the Saigon embassy, there was growing support for a coup against Diem. The Vietnamese generals did not act because they were caught off-guard by the strike against the pagodas. This was the end of total belief in Diem.

There was a high-level meeting in Washington on August 31 about the situation in Vietnam. McNamara expressed the view that they had to get rid of the Nhus and work with Diem. There were different opinions expressed at the meeting. By this time the U.S.

State Department was beginning to pay more attention to the political aspects of the crisis in Vietnam. Discussions continued the next month in different government quarters about what to do about Diem.

Some people in Washington began to question the military's reporting of the war. It was going well around Saigon where there was little action but it was not going well around the Mekong Delta. The Buddhist crisis had not reached that area yet. The AVRN, or South Vietnamese Army had collapsed in the Mekong Delta and the Vietcong were becoming stronger and stronger.

Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary and Analysis

The fact that the war was not going well made Kennedy very frustrated. McNamara and Taylor were sent to Vietnam in September to review the situation. At this time Kennedy learned that USAID had cut off commodity aid to Vietnam. Kennedy did not like it but found that it was an automatic move when there were disagreements with the host government.

In Vietnam McNamara began to suspect the accuracy of the military reporting. Even though the trip changed their perceptions of the situation, they wrote an optimistic report saying they felt the Americans would be out of Vietnam by the end of 1965. The Vietnamese people were hostile to both Diem and the Vietcong and a meeting was held with the Vietnamese generals about staging a coup against Diem. The U.S. assured the generals that U.S. aid would continue in the event of a coup and that the U.S. would do nothing to thwart a coup.

As the momentum developed for a coup, the government began cracking down against students. The coup was expected to occur before November 2. On November 1, around 1 pm, the troops that were thought to be loyal to the government began to assume strategic positions around Saigon. The U.S. did not know that Nhu had been tipped off and had a counterplan. Once the coup began, Nhu and Diem found out that the troops were not loyal and the only ones that remained loyal were the Palace Guard. The troops that surrounded the area refused to negotiate with them.

They contacted the U.S. embassy and told them of the situation. They were offered safe conduct out of the country. The two said they would stay in touch. By the time the palace was taken later that evening, Diem and Nhu had fled. They were eventually captured by the insurgents and killed. The coup was opposed by Lyndon Johnson.

The months of September and October went well for Kennedy. There was a thaw in the Cold War and he had Averell Harriman working on the test ban treaty. Kennedy no longer felt the compelling need to prove himself to Khrushchev and the world. He felt he had done so through Vietnam.

After Diem's death, certain facts became known and they were worse than the government had thought. There was no program to help the hamlets in the countryside, especially in the Delta area where the Vietcong had control. At this time Kennedy was turning his attention to the coming re-election campaign in 1964 and was making trips with speaking engagements. On one trip to Dallas, the President was assassinated.

"Lyndon Johnson seemed in those first few months to be always in motion, running, doing, persuading; if later much of the nation, bitter over its seemingly unscheduled and unchartered journey into Southeast Asia, turned on him and remember his years with

distaste, it was grateful for him then, and with good reason. His mandate seemed to be to hold the country together, to continue to exhort from those around him their best, to heal wounds and divisions," (Chapter 16, p. 369). Johnson had to mend the wounds caused by the assassination.

The Johnson administration did not deal with the situation in Vietnam immediately. If they had, the United States might not have found itself trapped there. The United States could not afford to lose more territory in the Cold War and, at the same time, they could not withstand a long involved war. They had also lost the illusion of the South Vietnamese fighting for their own sovereignty.

Johnson followed most of the Kennedy programs. In December 1963, McNamara wanted more information about the situation in Vietnam. He and others wanted a joint CIA-JCS study but the Pentagon did not want to take part so the CIA did the study on their own, sending about a dozen people to Vietnam. They filed a rather pessimistic report when they returned but the Pentagon managed to have his position prevail.

Dean Rusk was walking a line between the State Department and the Defense Department. State was against the B-52 bombings of Vietnam and wanted Rusk to intervene. He called McNamara on the matter and talked for a few minutes. Nothing came of State being able to block the bombings.

Rusk had gone to work for the State Department after the end of the Second World War. He worked on the formation of the United Nations and then was named Assistant Secretary for the Far East. He remained at State until taking a job as head of the Rockefeller Foundation. He was liked and respected at State and had been there when China fell and the French situation in Indochina worsened. Even though he had been a Rhodes Scholar, he was not considered to be on a par with Bundy or the others in the Kennedy group. Much of the delay in the Johnson administration dealing with Vietnam was attributed to Rusk.

Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary and Analysis

McNamara was the one who set the tone for Vietnam policy in the first few months of the Johnson administration. Rusk would later take on this role as his relationship with the new President developed. Bundy had a strained relationship with Johnson but the Johnson administration needed him, as became obvious when they found it hard to function when Bundy was on vacation.

McNamara's December 1963 trip to Vietnam revealed to him the degree to which he had been misled about the situation. The new government was not working out and the Vietcong were gaining in strength. Their Vietnam policy was placing increasing blame on Hanoi for the situation. The problems were political and this is what the intelligence reports were failing to pick up. In his meetings with the military, they worked out plans for covert operations against the North. The JCS viewed the problem as military and wanted to expand the war in January 1964. They were testing Johnson to see how far they could go and what his position was.

The new South Vietnamese government consisted of three generals, Minh, Don and Kim. They were not revolutionaries but were upper-class who had accommodated themselves to the French and the Diem regime. They did not want repression of the population. There was still a lot of dissent among the population and the South Vietnamese military and there were rumblings of coups by early 1964. A coup, led by Nguyen Khanh, overthrew the generals in February 1964. This added to the instability in the country.

Johnson felt that the coups made his position in Congress very difficult and he let it be known that he did not want anymore coups. They would support Khanh. McNamara met with Khanh on his trip amid much publicity. On a second trip in March, McNamara found that the situation was deteriorating and the Vietcong were stronger. The JCS began planning bombing attacks against the North which McNamara recommended to the President. The President authorized the planning since the administration still believed in the domino theory even though the CIA and other intelligence agencies were advising against it.

McNamara did not accept the correctness of the intelligence reports and when there was talk of establishing a neutral government in South Vietnam, McNamara advised Johnson against it since they might order the Americans to leave. They did not look at the difference in Vietnamese communism.

A study of the feasibility of bombing and its expected results was undertaken while McNamara was in Vietnam. The question was would it be enough to make Hanoi drop its support of the Vietcong and consent to negotiations? How would the U.S. exit in case of failure? What were the moral and legal implications? The study concluded that the

bombings would fail because they were based on damaging physical factors, which did not really interest the North. Bombings would in fact strengthen the control of the North and would not result in negotiations. There would be international opposition and the United States would become trapped.

Even though the study correctly predicted the results of bombing, it was ignored even though the bombings were delayed. When the decision to bomb was made a year later, the report was not looked at. By then a second study had been done with the military involved. This one concluded that bombing would work.

A gradual change occurred in the early months of 1964 as the subject of Vietnam became more sensitive. People in government became more cautious about who they talked to and what they said, not wanting to be seen associating with doves. Some reports were handwritten so secretaries would not see the contents. Much of this was due to the feelings of failure about the policy in Vietnam. The government bureaucracy was gearing up for war.

"So the reins of debate began to tighten and be limited, and the bureaucracy began to gear up for war. Individual doubters began to be overwhelmed by the force of the bureaucracy, the increasing thrust of it, mounting day by day, like the current of a river as it nears the ocean. And no one symbolized the force of the bureaucracy against the stand of the individual, the incapacity to be oneself because the price of being oneself meant losing one's governmental position and respectability as a player, more than a young Harvard Law School professor named John McNaughton," (Chapter 18, p. 441).

McNaughton worked on many of the papers that McNamara used to base his decisions on. McNaughton was portrayed as a hawk who dealt in facts. In actuality, he was a dove. He was not a member of the Eastern elite that had surrounded Kennedy, so many of his views differed from them as he questioned the U.S. commitment. It was McNaughton who gave Daniel Ellsberg the task of writing a paper to rationalize the way out of Vietnam. The report was secret and could not be typed by a secretary.

Ellsberg, like McNaughton, questioned whether the U.S. should even be in Vietnam. McNaughton would talk with an old friend at the White House, Michael Forrestal, about his doubts about Vietnam. Forrestal was not as pessimistic as McNaughton was and did not feel that the U.S. would become trapped by the situation. McNaughton would also tell McNamara his doubts and views, but McNamara always overrode them.

Changes in thinking were also taking place at the State Department. There were views of doubt at State also about the correctness of the war. Paul Kattenburg, the head of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Vietnam, held such a view. He had traveled to Vietnam in January 1964 and felt that the war was already lost before the bombings began. He was transferred to a different position. Bill Truehart was another State Department employee who was stationed in Vietnam until his views resulted in his transfer to Washington. Roger Hilsman was another man whose views caused problems at State. He was the center of the pessimistic group and had made an enemy of Lyndon

Johnson during the Kennedy term. Averell Harriman followed Hilsman in departing from State. He had made an enemy of Rusk during the Kennedy administration.

John Davis had been a State Department employee who had been tarnished by the McCarthy era. He moved his family to Peru. He had been a specialist on China and decided to return to the United States in 1964 to clear his name. It took him five years to do so during which he worked as a consultant and a writer. In 1971 he and his family relocated to Spain.

The year 1964 was a year when preparations for war were being made and people were being shifted into different positions. If the decision to bomb was made, the U.S. was ready. The Johnson administration was not optimistic about the situation in Vietnam but they acted as if they were.

Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary and Analysis

In the opening days of the Johnson administration, the new President was busy greeting ambassadors and heads of state, a task he did not feel comfortable with. The position on Vietnam was to keep it quiet for the 1964 campaign. In June, General William C. Westmoreland was named commander of American forces in Vietnam.

In July there was an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin that led to a series of covert actions known by the code name of 34A with General Harkins in command and McGeorge Bundy overseeing the operations in Washington. These operations were not made public and were intensified in the summer of 1964.

Two South Vietnamese patrol boats raided two North Vietnamese bases on July 30 as part of 34A. At the same time, the U.S. destroyer Maddox was in North Vietnamese territory to pinpoint radar installations. Hanoi viewed the destroyer's presence as part of the 34A operations and attacked with three PT boats. The Maddox sunk one on August 2. This incident led to the first bombing of the North and the passage of the Tonkin Resolution.

The first reaction in Washington was that the U.S. ships had been attacked and were the victims in the situation. On August 3 the U.S. ships were sent back into the area triggering what became known as the second Tonkin incident which resulted in retaliation by the United States. Before the passage of the Tonkin Resolution, Senator Wayne Morse received an anonymous call with the information that the story they were given was not true. He was told to request the logs of the Maddox and he would find the ship was closer to shore than reported. He was also told to ask about the real mission of the ship. Morse asked Senator Fulbright to hold hearings. He would not and the Resolution passed. Even though the passage represented a victory for President Johnson, he and other questioned the legal authority for the war.

Vietnam and the Tonkin incidents were campaign issues in the 1964 election. Whatever issue Barry Goldwater raised, the Johnson people had an answer for. By this time some elements in the population were beginning to question the policy in Vietnam and this set the stage for what was to happen in the coming years. The Free Speech movement was beginning at the University of California at Berkeley.

Lyndon Johnson was an accomplished politician. He wanted to control events. He wanted to achieve and wanted to be remembered as an achiever. He was a man who could get things done and was known as such. He also liked to be surrounded with doers. He could be rough on people, berating and humiliating them in front of others and then giving them an expensive gift later on in the day. Johnson mistakenly thought he could handle Ho Chi Minh in the same way.

Unlike Kennedy, Johnson did not seek out a variety of opinions. "Thus the decisions on Vietnam would be made by very few men, and the players would be different from those under Kennedy," (Chapter 20, p. 556).

Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary and Analysis

The government bureaucracy was gearing up for a war. They engaged in war games. Everything the U.S. did, Hanoi countered by sending more men down their trails. The more the U.S. did, the more men Hanoi sent from the North in the war games.

The conditions in the South continued to deteriorate and the U.S. kept hoping that something would happen to halt the deterioration. There was nothing that happened and the North kept getting stronger. By Thanksgiving 1964 there were calls for increased escalation, especially by Maxwell Taylor. Taylor made a trip to Vietnam in July and explained the objectives to the staff there. There were four alternatives open to the United States: they could withdraw, negotiate and accommodate, have the South take military action against the North or they could expand the pacification program. They were currently following the fourth alternative while they were preparing for the third.

Taylor was known to many as the soldier scholar. His actions were under the observation of the Coordinating group, a new office in the Pentagon that determined needs and budget. This was the beginning of the new managerial planning techniques. On the way back from Japan he wrote a paper about the program for Vietnam. After refinement, it was adopted. The new program was publicized at the military schools and on the bases. It was basically a program for publicizing the Army's viewpoint. The result was a series of newspaper articles about the Coordinating group that resulted in its disbandment. Taylor eventually resigned and entered the private sector but came back when Kennedy asked him to.

With all of his experience, Taylor was not really ready for the situation that confronted him in Vietnam and his years there were not happy ones. He could not understand the attitude of the Vietnamese people. Khanh was not the kind of man the Americans thought he was. He was another Diem. None of the things that Taylor tried worked. Taylor could not control things like he could in other jobs he had had. He began to view bombing as a viable possibility. He did not favor the total bombing as the rest of the military did, but he began to view bombing as a political weapon. He suggested a bombing campaign to begin in January, 1965 and communicated his advice to the President.

The view was that Hanoi would try to protect its industrial base. The U.S. would undertake bombing if the Khanh regime would implement policies for more stability in the South Vietnamese government. As it happened, events in Ben Hoa in the fall triggered the massive bombing operations when the North attacked a squadron of B-57 bombers that were on the ground. Even Taylor, who was the ambassador to Saigon, came out in favor of bombing.

Johnson had won the election in November, 1964 and there was an overwhelming Democratic victory in the Senate. The bombing issue was being studied. The military position was that if they went to war they used the maximum force to obliterate the enemy although they sensed that they would end up with light bombing that would steadily increase.

Most of the people who questioned the U.S. presence in Vietnam were no longer with the administration. The only one arguing against escalation was George Ball. He had begun to put together his own team when it looked like the war would escalate. A group was formed by William Bundy, the older brother of McGeorge, to study the issue. They presented three options to the President. The first was light bombing with more covert operations. The second was massive bombing. The third was a moderate approach which gave the civilians control.

In November Johnson was not sure that bombing would solve the problem in Vietnam. Part of the indecision of the President's part was the instability of the regime. There could be a coup at any time. Talks were taking place with U.S. allies about the possibility of bombings. Charles de Gaulle of France was not in favor of it.

In January, even though Johnson had not announced his position, the assumption was that there would be a slow bombing campaign. Johnson sent Taylor back to Vietnam with instructions that they needed an effective and stable government before they could move against the North.

Chapters 23-24

Chapters 23-24 Summary and Analysis

Johnson was basically a peace candidate when he won the 1964 election. McNamara was the big supporter of bombing and was making a case for bombing. He collected information about atrocities against American soldiers to present to the President to build his case. The President's thinking began to change after the Vietcong attack on Qui Nhon. Years later McNamara was to say that he had doubts about the bombing while he supported bombing one hundred percent in meetings.

The situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating. The Vietcong were stronger and so was the amount of infiltration. Rusk was still undecided about the issue of bombing but McGeorge Bundy was beginning to support the action. After the inauguration the issue of Vietnam could no longer be ignored and they proposed a trip by Bundy. The team up of Bundy and McNamara put pressure on Rusk who eventually joined them.

The Bundy trip had Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa and Pleiku on the itinerary. It was opposed by the State Department who felt that they already had enough people on the scene. The trip coincided with a visit to Hanoi by Premiere Kosygin of the Soviet Union. When the Vietcong attacked the Americans in Pleiku, it resulted in a decision for retaliation while Bundy was in Saigon.

Bundy wrote a memo about his trip and he was decidedly hawkish. He felt that even if the policy of reprisals failed, it would be worth it or they would face defeat by the end of the year. Surrender would be the result of any negotiated peace. He advocated a policy of reprisals that would vary, depending on the actions of the Vietcong. The final decision was up to the President who finally authorized the sustained bombing on February 13, 1965.

The campaign was known as Rolling Thunder and its purpose was to force Hanoi to negotiate. The intelligence community advised that the campaign would not work. They could not force Hanoi to negotiate when the bombings were taking place. Westmoreland's staff outlined three possible responses from the North Vietnamese. The first involved an overt attack, the second involved more activities and infiltration and the third was the use of North Vietnamese divisions with attacks on Danang or Hue. Rostow had advised the U.S. could not achieve the desired ratio of ten to one against the guerrillas, but because of U.S. firepower and technology, the ratio was brought down to four to one.

Westmoreland was prepared when the bombings began in February 1965. Through March and April, the control shifted from Taylor to Westmoreland. They began to scale down figures on enemy strength in reports to Washington. Westmoreland sent marine troops to strengthen Danang. Taylor questioned the move since it would lead to the use of further troops in other areas.

Westmoreland did not understand the Vietnamese people and their link to the Vietcong. He viewed the war in terms of battalions which the enemy had an almost infinite capacity to replenish. Westmoreland was a Southerner who was liked and trusted by the President.

Chapters 25-26

Chapters 25-26 Summary and Analysis

March, 1965 saw a struggle over whether or not to send more troops to Vietnam. There was also the question of strategy, the number of troops and how they would be used. By June there was a Westmoreland search-and-destroy strategy. Each step led to deeper involvement. President Johnson sent General Harold K. Johnson to Vietnam to investigate the situation. All he was hearing from the military was to bomb instead of giving him answers and solutions.

Westmoreland wanted more combat troops than the more conservative Taylor did. There was the issue of the troops' exit from any confrontation. Westmoreland was convinced that the troop reserves of the North had not even been tapped into yet. The situation in the South was changing as the military became more active and the civilians became more passive.

By the end of March, Rolling Thunder had been in effect for six weeks and it was obvious that it was not going to force the North into negotiations. It was also obvious that the military was going to be forced to use more ground forces. At a March 29 meeting, they discussed how many division and where to send them. They also considered the flash point, which is the point to which they could escalate without actually going to war.

Taylor felt that there were three issues. The first issue was the pace of Rolling Thunder, the second was the use of troops and the third was how to end the war. The options involved in the third issue were to stop the bombing or to withdraw from South Vietnam. The President also expressed his concerns about the situation but placed more emphasis on what America could do. The opinion of the military was that the war would last for six months. They did not think the North would be able to take the pressure for longer than that.

At an April 20 meeting in Honolulu, the military agreed to increased troop usage. The CIA director told an NSC meeting that the result would be increased infiltration and an escalation in the efforts of the North. There had been ten weeks of bombings at this time.

During the winter, the Vietcong rested and built up their forces. The Spring offensive began in early May. It was such a ferocious and strong attack that they overran the Southern forces. Westmoreland asked for a major troop commitment of thirty five battalions on June 7. This would raise the troop commitment to two hundred thousand. At this point the Johnson administration had imposed almost a total blackout on the subject of Vietnam. Johnson's Press Secretary was given very little information so he could not accidentally leak any at the daily news briefings.

One day State Department briefing officer Robert McCloskey piecemealed what he could and decided to tell the press what he knew. This was on June 8 and he told the press that Westmoreland had the authority to authorize troops and use them as he saw fit. Everyone figured that McCloskey would be fired, but Rusk protected him. At the White House, Bill Moyers became the new Press Secretary, replacing George Reedy. There were other replacements at this time. Arthur Goldberg had retired from the Supreme Court and Adlai Stevenson had left the United Nations post. Goldberg went to the United Nations.

There were also changes taking place in society that the administration did not pay attention to. These changes would eventually fulminate to challenge the existing order. At the same time, Johnson did not want his Great Society program threatened. As a result, some of the figures were not entirely accurate. This was the beginning of the credibility gap. Johnson announced that the number of troops would increase from seventy five thousand to one hundred twenty five thousand. They knew then that the figure would rise to three hundred thousand in 1966.

Chapters 27 - Epilogue - Final Word

Chapters 27 - Epilogue - Final Word Summary and Analysis

Wars cost money and Vietnam was a costly war. The administration tried to keep the true cost hidden and this caused public relations problems for them. "The full dimensions of the American commitment could be kept partially secret from the press and the Congress and the allies. But eventually someone had to pay for it, and in the very process of the payment, some of the plans, projections and realities would have to become public," (Chapter 27, p. 732).

Johnson wanted to keep planning for the war as much of a secret as he could. This meant he did not reveal the accurate economic projections or request raises in taxes to finance the war. Administration officials gave various estimates of the cost of the war but failed to raise taxes. This would result in inflation in later years.

The chance for negotiation did not exist and the troops were sent in. The first confrontation came in November 1965 and resulted in twelve hundred Vietcong casualties and two hundred U.S. casualties. Westmoreland considered it a victory.

The attitude of the nation was influenced by the media coverage of the war. The administration led the public to believe that it would not be a large war. As the situation deteriorated, more bombings took place and more troops were involved. Anti-war protests began and became more and more confrontational. The administration became more defensive. The war did not unite the nation, it divided the nation. The projections from Westmoreland were for more troops and more years of war.

The war continued when the Nixon administration came to power. There were peace talks in 1968 in Paris. The Thieu regime was still in power in Saigon. Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State and took a hard-line on the war like Nixon did. The North Vietnamese knew that time was on their side. They knew the Americans would leave one day so they just waited.

"In world eyes the bombing, in the name of a losing cause, made the United States look, if anything, even crueler. Peace seemed nowhere near in the summer of 1972, unless the President abruptly changed his policies, and so the American dilemma remained. Time was on the side of the enemy, and we were in a position of not being able to win, not being able to get out, not being able to get our prisoners home, only being able to lash out and bomb. The inability of the Americans to impose their will on Vietnam had been answered in 1968, yet the leadership of this country had not been able to adjust our goals to that failure. And so the war went on, tearing at this country; a sense of numbness seemed to replace an earlier anger. There was Americans were finding, no light at the end of the tunnel, only greater darkness," (Final Word, pp. 808-809).

Characters

Lyndon B. Johnson

Lyndon B. Johnson was Vice-President in the Kennedy administration. He was from Texas and had been the chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which Kennedy had served. His father had been a member of the Texas legislature and as soon as Lyndon finished college, he obtained a job in the office of the local congressman. He headed the National Youth Administration in Texas and ran for a vacant House seat in 1937. His first attempt for the Senate in 1941 failed but he was elected in the late 1940s and spent the 1950s moving up the ladder in the Senate power structure.

Johnson was not a member of the Eastern elite as many of the Kennedy men had been. He was in many ways the opposite of Kennedy. Kennedy was an avid reader; Johnson very rarely read books. Johnson would humiliate people in front of colleagues and later in the day give the person an expensive gift like a car. Johnson was a man who wanted to be known as an achiever and he paid attention to minute details. He was also known for his excessive flattery and was not good at remembering names.

John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy is President-elect of the United States at the book's opening. Kennedy was the son of Joseph P. and Rose Kennedy. He was wealthy and well-educated and of Irish-Catholic heritage. Although excluded from the top social circles as a youth, he was now a part of the best of society. He was brash and concerned with the idea of not appearing weak to the Soviets. He had the power and the drive that he needed to succeed in politics. Kennedy was educated at Choate preparatory school and then Harvard. He served in World War II and then entered politics. He worked for civil rights and established the Peace Corps because he felt it was important to establish the role America played in the world.

Kennedy was elected in a very close election against Richard Nixon. He surrounded himself with advisors from the Eastern schools who were considered to be a group of intellectuals. Kennedy and his team were young and out to prove themselves during the era of Camelot. Kennedy served as President until his assassination in November 1963, when he was succeeded by Lyndon Johnson.

Robert S. Lovett

Robert S. Lovett is the man that Joseph P. Kennedy wanted his son to appoint as Secretary of State. Lovett was a well-respected statesman and financier who is a link to previous eras. He was born in Huntsville, Texas in 1895. His father had been a counsel for Harriman's Union Pacific Railroad. He attended Yale and was the commander of the

first U.S. Naval Air Squadron in World War I. He married Adele Brown and went to work for her father's investment banking firm where he began as a clerk and worked his way up to partner. He helped negotiate the Brown Bros. merger with Harriman. Lovett became interested in foreign affairs and joined the Council on Foreign Relations which lead to government work. He worked with the Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff during World War II. In 1947 Lovett was named as the successor to Dean Acheson as Undersecretary of State and in 1950 he was named as Secretary of Defense.

Chester Bowles

Chester Bowles was from Connecticut and functioned as the chief foreign policy advisor to Kennedy during the campaign. He was born in 1901 and attended the Yale engineering school. Bowles worked at his family's newspaper and later served as a foreign service officer in China. During the Depression, he formed the advertising firm of Benton & Bowles and prospered, becoming a millionaire by the time he was thirty. Bowles served as director of the Office of Price Administration during the Second World War. He was also elected as governor of Connecticut and served as ambassador to India during the 1950s. Bowles considered poverty and hunger to be more serious problems than those posed by the Cold War. He was a firm believer in the New England republic concept of government with town hall meetings and elected representatives consulting with their constituents. Bowles served as Undersecretary of State for Dean Rusk until 1961 when he was shifted to a desk at the White House and eventually sent to India as ambassador. He opposed the Bay of Pigs invasion which eventually led to his being shifted to a position as roving ambassador.

Dean Rusk

Dean Rusk was born in Georgia and was raised as a Calvinist. He was active in ROTC when he attended high school at Atlanta Boys High. He worked as a clerk in a law office for two years to earn money to attend Davidson where he graduated as a Phi Beta Kappa. He received a Rhodes scholarship and went to Oxford. He also spent a semester in Germany as Hitler came to power. Returning to America in 1934, he taught political science at Mills College and married Virginia Foisie in 1937. He served in the China-Burma-India theater in World War II and at State after the war where he worked on the planning for the United Nations. He eventually became director of Special Political Affairs. Later in 1950 he was named the Assistant Secretary for the Far East. Rusk was at State when China fell and when the French involvement in Vietnam intensified. He supported Dean Acheson in his views. When he was forty-three, he left State to head the Rockefeller Foundation. Kennedy wanted to act as his own Secretary of State so Rusk was not strong in the position.

Robert McNamara

Robert McNamara was the Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy administration. He had previously been a high level executive at Ford Motor Company. Kennedy offered him the jobs of Defense or Treasury. Since he found finance to be boring, he accepted the position at Defense. His views were liberal on most of the issues with the exception of labor. His technique of analysis and management relied heavily on statistics.

McNamara was born in 1916 in San Francisco. His father had been a sales manager for a shoe company. The family moved across the bay when McNamara was a child. He attended the University of California at Berkeley and then Harvard Business School. After working at Price Waterhouse, he married his wife Marge and took a teaching job at Harvard.

William C. Westmoreland

General William C. Westmoreland was named commander of American forces in Vietnam in June 1964. He had been born in South Carolina in 1914, three miles west of Spartanburg. His father was the manager of a local textile factory. Even as a youth, Westmoreland had been fascinated by uniforms and playing soldier. He attended the Citadel and then West Point where he became the First Captain of his class. He served in North Africa in World War II and then in Sicily. He was also involved in the invasion of Normandy and was made Chief of Staff of the 82nd Airborne. It was then that he married Kitsy Van Dusen. After teaching at the Army War College he entered the Korean War as commander of the 187th Regimental Combat Team from which he earned his first star. After Korea he worked at the Pentagon and went to Harvard Business School. He became Secretary of the General Staff in 1955 under Max Taylor. In 1958, Westmoreland reactivated the 101st at Fort Campbell and then became Superintendent of West Point where he remained for three years. Westmoreland was liked and trusted by Lyndon Johnson.

Walt Rostow

Walt Rostow was the son of a Russian Jewish immigrant and born in New York in 1916. He was a graduate of Yale and a Rhodes scholar who met John Kennedy in the 1950s. Rostow was widely published, having written numerous articles and books and was well liked and respected by his colleagues at Harvard. He functioned as an advisor to Kennedy during the campaign and was a strong believer in his own ideas. Rostow had been promised the job as the head of the Policy Planning Council at the State Department but he did not receive the job. He worked at the White House as the deputy to McGeorge Bundy. Rostow supported a firm anti-communist policy in Vietnam. Rostow was sent to Vietnam, along with Maxwell Taylor, on a fact finding mission by the President. Their report led to increased U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Maxwell Taylor

Maxwell Taylor was President Kennedy's military analyst. He was sent to Vietnam in October 1961 with Walt Rostow on a fact finding mission. He was the co-author of the report that led to increased U.S. involvement in Vietnam

Taylor was from Missouri and had attended West Point, where he graduated fourth in his class in 1922 and became a colonel. He first arrived in Vietnam in 1961. He was fluent in French, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, German and Italian. He was sent to China in 1937 to work as a translator and he was in Europe during World War II. After a stint as Superintendent of West Point, he became first commander in Berlin. He had the command of the Eighth Army in Korea and from there he went to Tokyo to command the ground forces in Japan, Korea and Okinawa. Under Eisenhower, in 1955, he became Chief of Staff of the Army. He entered the private sector in 1959 at Mexican Power and Light Company and eventually became president of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York.

McGeorge Bundy

McGeorge Bundy was appointed as Special Assistant to the President for National Security. He was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan and educated at Groton and Yale. His mother was descended from the Lowells, a well known New England family. McGeorge, known as Mac, was born in 1919 and joined the right clubs and made the right friends at Groton and Yale. He was a top student and won many honors and awards. He had been the Dean of Harvard College and head of the Ford Foundation and was the author of two books. Bundy served in the Army during World War II and was one of President Kennedy's favorites.

Averell Harriman

Averell Harriman was a sixty-nine year old statesman and the son of E.H. Harriman, the founder of the Union Pacific Railroad. He attended Groton and Yale and sat on the board of the Union Pacific beginning in his senior year in college. In 1958, he opposed Nelson Rockefeller for the position of governor of New York and was badly beaten. He worked as a roving ambassador for the Kennedy administration.

John McNaughton

John McNaughton was a professor of law at Harvard Law School. He had worked in government during the period of the decision-making on the bombings. He wrote many papers that McNamara used in the decision making process and was viewed as a hawk, even though he was privately a dove. He and his wife and son were later killed in a plane accident in 1967.

Edward Lansdale

Edward Lansdale was a brigadier general who has spent a great deal of time in Vietnam. He groomed Ngo Dinh Diem for the position of President when the U.S. needed an anti-communist leader. Lansdale was included in the October 1961 Rostow-Taylor fact-finding group that went to Vietnam.

George F. Kennan

George F. Kennan was a diplomat at the U.S. embassy in Moscow. He wrote books and articles on foreign policy that were widely read by college students. His ideas were exploited by some people in the Kennedy administration and led to increased militarization.

Paul Harkins

General Paul Harkins was named to head the U.S. command in Saigon in January 1962. He was fifty-seven years of age at the time. When he arrived in Vietnam, he was not knowledgeable abut the country's history or the kind of war he was getting involved in.

Nguyen Dinh Thuan

Nguyen Dinh Thuan was Acting Defense Minister. He requested American troops in October 1961. Next to the family of the President, he was the most powerful man in the country.

Franklin Roosevelt

Franklin Roosevelt was the President of the United States during World War II. While he did not favor the French presence in Indochina, he did not devise any plans to prevent their return after the war.

Joseph Alsop

Joseph Alsop was a popular and influential columnist who was critical of the U.S. failure to support Chaing Kai-shek in preventing China from going communist. He was included in the Rostow-Taylor fact finding mission to Vietnam in October 1961.

George Ball

George Ball worked in the State Department and was one of the few remaining doves at the time of the escalation of the war. He was a New Deal lawyer from Chicago and had not been a part of the Eastern elite group that surrounded Kennedy.

Ngo Dinh Nhu

Ngo Dinh Nhu was the brother of President Ngo Ding Diem and the second most powerful man in the country.

George Marshall

General George Marshall was a strong military figure in the post World War I and World War II era.

Nikita Khrushchev

Nikita Khrushchev was the premiere of the Soviet Union, the United State's primary opponent in the Cold War.

Aleksei Kosygin

Aleksei Kosygin was the Russian premiere who succeeded Khrushchev.

Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh was the leader of the Vietcong.

Daniel Ellsberg

Daniel Ellsberg was a Pentagon analyst. He was opposed to the war in Vietnam.

Ngo Dinh Diem

Ngo Dinh Diem became President of Viet Nam in 1954. He was trained by the U.S.

Objects/Places

Georgetown

Georgetown is a section of Washington, D.C. where the Kennedy townhouse was located. It is the site of the opening of the book.

Boston

The Boston area is where many of the administration people were from.

Washington D.C.

Washington D.C. is the site of much of the story of the book. It is where the White House and government are located.

Potsdam

Potsdam is where the post-World War II division of nations was decided. Most of the emphasis was on Europe, with Indochina being divided between Japan and China. This set the scene for the later problems in the area.

Vienna

Vienna, Austria was the site of the summit between John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev.

Cuba

Cuba is a Caribbean island that was the site of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Laos

Laos is a country in Indochina bordering China. It was the site of the first confrontation with the French.

Vietnam

Vietnam was a country in Indochina that eventually divided into communist North Vietnam and democratic South Vietnam.

Detroit

The Detroit, Michigan area is the location of the Ford Motor Company where Robert McNamara worked.

Cambodia

Cambodia is a country in Indochina which borders Vietnam and was the place where the communists launched infiltration campaigns and raids.

Themes

Kennedy's Need to Prove Himself

One of the underlying themes is President Kennedy's need to prove himself. Kennedy was the youngest man to be elected to the position of President of the United States at the time. He felt that his age was a factor in his dealings in foreign affairs and felt a constant need to prove himself to be competent and tough. This was obvious in his summit meeting with Nikita Khrushchev when the Russian Premiere tried to bully the young U.S. President. Kennedy came away from the conference feeling that he had to prove that he was tough to the Soviets and that he was not going to let the Soviets push him around.

This need to prove himself was behind many of the decisions and policies of the Kennedy administration. Kennedy felt that the one place he could prove his abilities and toughness was to take an aggressive anti-communist stance in Vietnam. This eventually led to the increased U.S. involvement in the area. Kennedy had this feeling of inferiority until the fall of 1963 right before his assassination. He attributed the establishment of American strength and power that he gave the world as coming from Vietnam. This view may have clouded many of his decisions.

Cold War

The Cold War mentality prevails throughout the book. The Cold War developed in the years following World War II when many countries in the world were divided between the West and the East. It was an era of paranoia and the escalation of the arms race. Due to it, many situations, like the situation in Indochina, were viewed in the wrong way and the result was a lot of decisions were made in the improper context.

Indochina, and Vietnam were viewed within the context of the domino theory. This viewed the situation as a game of dominos. When one country fell into the communist sphere, the others would follow. Taking this view meant the U.S. ignored the history of the area and the desires of the people. They even ignored their own intelligence reports telling them that the North Vietnamese would not be pushed into peace negotiations by bombing.

If Vietnam had not been a part of the Cold War era, the government might have acted differently and allowed the Vietnamese people to determine their own destiny.

Inability to Admit Being Wrong

One of the underlying themes, one that is referred to infrequently during the book, is the government's inability to admit that it was wrong. The French and the Americans were

wrong right from the end of World War II when the French were allowed to return to Indochina. This set the stage for what was to follow in the next thirty or more years.

The situation in Indochina was viewed as political, in the context of the communist goal of world domination instead of in the context of colonialism and people wanting to determine their own destinies. The United States continually misread the situation in Southeast Asia about people wanting to be free. The U.S. government thought their firepower and technology were what the people wanted and needed. It did not matter that it did not fit the situation of the population. They thought that Ho could be forced into negotiations through damage to the industrial infrastructure of the North, not understanding that the physical infrastructure was not what was important.

Even though the U.S. knew that it was getting in deeper and deeper, it did not withdraw. That was the terrible price of Vietnam. It involved a cost not only in dollars and the future effects on the U.S. and other economies, but also a terrible cost in lives.

Style

Perspective

The book is written in the perspective of a factual and objective document, describing the facts as the author found them to be from the French colonial days until the Nixon administration. It is written in the third person with the author being the narrator. There is a great deal of research and interviews that went into the book as is obvious when reading the book. It is full of examinations of reports, meetings and conversations between various government entities.

The intended audience for the book is anyone with an interest in the area or the time period. The book presents many historical facts that were relevant to the situation. The author traces the history of the situation from the colonial and how colonialism was returned to the region after World War II when no one stopped the French from returning. The result was instant conflict in the region.

The reader has to be impressed by the depth of the author's research even though the book is quite lengthy. He spends quite a bit on time on background information, a lot of which is nonessential. In this sense the book is longer than it needs to be to tell the story of Vietnam.

Tone

The tone of the book is objective and factual. The author presents many quotes from reports, meetings, and interviews pertaining to the situation. The book contains a great deal of information that gives the reader the proper historical context for viewing the situation in. Without this background information, such as the colonialism and the events after World War II, the reader could not view Indochina in the proper perspective.

Much of the book has to do with the decisions of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and how they came to make the decisions that they made. Thus, there is a lot of material about meetings, papers, and discussions throughout the book and how they all affected the decisions made by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

The author objectively points out the facts. He does not press his views on the reader and does not let the reader know what his views are. This is what objectivity is all about. The reader is presented with the facts and is left to draw his own conclusions. The author respects the reader's intelligence by allowing the reader to draw his own conclusions and the reader has to respect the author for this.

Structure

The book consists of twenty-seven chapters, an Epilogue and a section entitled the Final Word. There is no Preface, Forward or Table of Contents. There is an index so the reader can look up the numerous characters that appear in the book. There are no maps or illustrations in the book. The book begins with the pre-inauguration period of the Kennedy presidency when Kennedy is interviewing people for different government posts.

The chapters are of varying length from a few pages to forty or fifty pages. They are packed full of details and historical facts. The book jumps around a bit and the background of the characters is provided throughout the novel. They are not all introduced with their background where they first appear. Sometimes this results in the reader having to backtrack a bit to find out who the character is. The author also wanders during the course of the chapters. He beings with one topic and then tells a story of the past with the various characters involved. This makes the book a little difficult to follow.

The book does what the author set out to do. He sets out to tell the story of Vietnam and U.S. involvement in Indochina and he accomplishes his purpose.

Quotes

"Yet it seemed as if history had come their way: just as they had predicted, the Russians proved untrustworthy and ungentlemanly (by 1944 there had been growing tensions between Roosevelt and some of his national security people over Soviet postwar aims; the national security people had held a view more parallel to that of Churchill) and had tried to expand in Europe, but Western democratic leadership had turned them back. They were not surprised that a cold war ensued; it very existence made their role, their guidance more necessary than ever. Without the Cold War—its dangers, tensions and threats—there might have been considerable less need of them and their wisdom and respectability. The lesson of history from Munich to Berlin was basic, they decided: one had to stand up to be stern, to be tough. Lovett himself would talk of those years in the late forties as almost miraculous ones, when the American executive branch and the Congress were as one, when the Marshall Plan, the Point Four program NATO had come about and been approved," (Chapter 1, p. 14).

"So if Kennedy straddled the two positions, it was not surprising—given the era, the Cold War still a major part of our life—that in January 1960 when he announced his candidacy for the Presidency his friend Joseph Alsop, the liberal hard-line columnist and journalistically a purveyor of the Acheson line, watched him and said enthusiastically to Earl Mazo, another reporter, 'Isn't he marvelous! A Stevenson with balls,'" (Chapter 2, p. 34).

"What it came down to was a search not for the most talent, the greatest brilliance, but for the fewest black marks, the fewest objections. The man who had made the fewest enemies in an era when forceful men espousing good causes had made many enemies: the Kennedys were looking for someone who made very small waves. They were looking for a man to fill the most important Cabinet post, a job requiring infinite qualities of intelligence, wisdom and sophistication, a knowledge of both this country and the world, and they were going at it as candidates had often filled that other most crucial post, the Vice-Presidency, by choosing someone who had offended the fewest people. Everybody's number two choice," (Chapter 3, pp. 42-43).

"If they had much in common, Jack Kennedy still had some advantages; though he was a new kind of Brahmin he was nonetheless a product of outsiders, he knew the difference between theory and practice in the society, the little things about America that the history books never tell. He had traveled a far longer and harder road than Bundy; he had triumphed in electoral politics and had thus created a real base for himself, whereas Bundy had no personal base," (Chapter 4, p. 75).

"In a way it was a test run for the Vietnam escalations of 1965, and it would be said of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson that both had their Bay of Pigs, that the former's lasted four days and the latter's lasted four years. But the component parts were there: serious misreading of aspirations of a nonwhite nation; bringing Western, Caucasian anti-Communism to a place where it was less applicable; institutions pushing forward

with their own momentum, ideas and programs which tended to justify and advance the cause of the institution at the expense of the nation; too much secrecy with too many experts who knew remarkably little either about the country involved or about their own country; too many decisions by the private men of the Administration as opposed to the public ones; and too little moral reference. And finally, too little common sense. How a President who seemed so contemporary could agree to a plan so obviously doomed to failure, a plan based on so little understanding of the situation, was astounding," (Chapter 5, p. 84).

"At that point Laos seemed a dubious proposition; if ever anything was an invention of the Cold War and its crisis psychology, it was the illusion of Laos. It was a landlocked country, a part of the Indochina nation, and the Laotians, a peaceful people living on the China border, had managed to participate as little as possible in the French Indochina war. Of the Indochinese peoples it was the Vietnamese and particularly the North Vietnamese who were considered warriors, but Dulles had decided to turn Laos into what he called 'a bastion of the free world.' It was the least likely bastion imaginable; it seemed like a country created by Peter Ustinov for one of his plays. The best writing about its military and political turmoil was found not on the front pages of the great newspapers, but rather in the satire of Russell Baker and Art Buchwald. Its people were sleepy, unwarlike, uninterested in the great issues of ideology; yet unlikely or not, it bore the imprimatur of American foreign policy of that era: the search for an Asian leader who told us what we wanted to hear, the creation of an army in our image, the injection of Cold War competition rather than an attempt to reduce tension and concentrate on legitimate local grievances or an attempt to identify with nationalists stirrings, no mater how faint. Since there was neither a hot nor a cold war in Laos, the problem fell between State and defense—the very small war, semicovert—and thus it was a CIA show, the country perilously close to being a CIA colony (in the sense that the local airline was run by the CIA, and a good many of the bureaucratic jobs were financed by the CIA)," (Chapter 6, p. 110).

"As World War I had taken a decaying feudal Russian regime and finally destroyed it, bringing on the Communists, as Japan's aggression against China, the first step in which was to become World War II, did the same thing to China: a fledging semidemocratic government was trying to emerge from a dark and feudal past and was pushed beyond the point of cohesion, the Japanese catching Chiang Kai-shek when he might have moved into the modern era and frightening him back into the past, revealing more his weaknesses than his strengths. The embryo China of Chiang came apart, and the new China would not be that of Chiang and the Western powers, but of Mao Tse-rung and the Communists, a powerful modern antifeudal force touching the peasants and the age-old resentment against foreign intrusion, liberating powerful latent feelings in that great country," (Chapter 7, pp. 137-138).

"The essence of good foreign policy is constant re-examination. The world changes, and both domestic perceptions of the world and domestic perception of national political possibilities change. It was one thing to base a policy in Southeast Asia on total anti-Communism in the early 1950s when the Korean War was being fought, and when the French Indochina war was still at its height, when there was, on the surface at least,

some evidence of a Communist monolith, and when the United States at home was becoming locked into the harshest of the McCarthy tensions. But it was another thing to accept these policies quite so casually in 1961 (Although McCarthy was gone and the atmosphere in which the policies had been set had changed, the policies remained much the same), when both the world and the United States were very different. By 1961, the schism in the Communist world was clearly apparent: Khrushchev had removed his technicians and engineers from China," (Chapter 8, p. 151).

"All in all, the Taylor-Rostow report is an extraordinary document and provides a great insight into the era. It shows a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the war (there was no discussion of the serious political problems of the war in Taylor's cables). It was arrogant and contemptuous toward a foe who had a distinguished and impressive record against a previous Western challenger. It was written by a general who had seen the limits of air power in Korea and now said that if things went wrong, air power would handle Hanoi any time we wanted. It assumed that the people and the government of South Vietnam were the same thing; yet it also said that a people allegedly fighting for their survival, already overstocked with American aid and material, needed reassurance, that the problem was not one of political origin, but of confidence. When Ridgway in 1954 investigated the possibility of U.S. troops in Indochina, he maximized the risks and minimized the benefits; now Taylor was maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks," (Chapter 9, p. 213).

"The Americans were not modernizing Vietnamese society as Rostow had hoped; they were in fact making it more authoritarian and less responsive than ever. It did not change the balance in the countryside; if anything it simply meant that the Vietcong would not capture newer, better American weapons instead of old, used French weapons ('Ngo Dinh Diem will be our supply sergeant,' said one highly accurate Vietcong paper of the period)," (Chapter 10, p. 226).

"By sending its vast advisory and support group—which would eventually number some 18,000 men—the Administration had changed the commitment without changing the war, or the problems which had caused it. If it did not improve the war effort, the commitment did affect Washington; it deepened the Administration's involvement in Vietnam, making it a more important country, moving it off the back burner of crisis quotient. It made the Administration dependent on the military reporting and estimates, for the military would dominate the reporting. The question was no longer one Diem's popularity or effectiveness (the answer to that question was that he was not popular, but he was respected); the real question now was the war, whether it was being won," (Chapter 11, p. 247).

"The commitment was already operative, burning with a special fuel of its own—bureaucratic momentum and individual ambition—men let loose in Saigon and Washington who never questioned whether that something was right or wrong, or whether it worked or not. In government it is always easier to go forward with a program that does not work than to stop it altogether and admit failure. John Kennedy was fast

learning that his personal and political interests were not necessarily the same as those of the thousands of men who worked in the government," (Chapter 11, pp. 261-262).

"He could handle the military. That, of course, was the basis of his legend. Washington was filled with stories of McNamara browbeating the military, forcing them to reconsider, taking their pet projects away from them. Later, as his reputation dimmed and the defense budget grew (it was not just Vietnam, it was other projects as well), some of those who had been part of that Administration suspected that he had in no real way handled the military, but rather, that he had brought them kicking and screaming and protesting to the zenith of their power. At the very least, it turned out that he had controlled the military only as long as we were not in a real war and that the best way for civilians to harness generals was to stay out of wars. That wisdom would come later," (Chapter 12, pp. 264-265).

"It would be one of the smaller ironies of his years as Secretary of Defense that in making his arguments against nuclear weapons, forcefully, relentlessly, he had to make counter-arguments for conventional forces, to build up those conventional forces. We had to have some kind of armed might, so he made good and effective arguments for conventional weapons (and if the Chiefs wanted to use them in Vietnam, to send American combat troops without nuclear weapons, he had to go along, since he had developed the thesis, the mystique of what conventional weapons could do with the new mobility). He gave them a rationale, for his overriding concern was quickly to limit the possibilities of nuclear war, to gain control of those weapons," (Chapter 13, p. 297).

"Now suddenly, under crisis conditions, the Kennedy Administration was finding itself confronted with the questions it should have faced and resolved almost two years earlier, when it slipped into the larger commitment. The political problems of Vietnam now seemed very real because they had acquired greater American potential, and they did not go away. For the first time the State Department people were making something of a case for the basically political nature of the war," (Chapter 14, p. 333).

"In addition, the one factor which had briefly in the nine years of the country's existence given even the vaguest element of unity to a non-Communist South Vietnam was gone —opposition to the Ngo family. For Diem, the responsibility had been too much; he was a feudal leader, a man of the past trying to rule by outmoded means and dependent upon outside Caucasian support. There were many epitaphs written for him in the next few weeks...." (Chapter 15, p. 356).

"More skeptical, more subtle than his public pronouncements, he had nonetheless failed to deal with Vietnam as a political problem. His response, if not combat troops, had been highly operational and functional and programmatic. He had worked to conceal the truth about Vietnam from the public and had markedly increased the American commitment, and he had severely limited the hand of a fresh, unsure successor. And he had passed on to the successor the brilliant, activist can-do Kennedy team, a team

somewhat tempered in the past by Kennedy's own skepticism, but which nor found itself harnessed to the classic can-do President. He had deepened the commitment there, and he had, in a way, always known better. He had preached, both in his book and in his speeches, about the importance of political courage, but his Administration had been reasonably free from acts of courage, such as turning around the irrationality of the China policy. In this most crucial area the record was largely one of timidity," (Chapter 15, pp. 367-368).

"Besides, Lyndon Johnson liked choices and options. So it was a list year; opportunities were lost for possible political negotiation, of re-evaluation of American attitudes, of perhaps convincing the American public that it wasn't worth it, that the Vietnamese themselves did not care that much about the war. Instead of that, they held the line. They did not think time was working against them and decided not to deal with Vietnam in 1964, but to keep their options open. They would not be entrapped, they would make their decisions carefully and in their own time...." (Chapter 16, pp. 371-372).

"It was, in fact, the Secretary of Defense playing the role of Secretary of State, and going ahead with the straight domino theory, though the CIA and the other intelligence agencies were reporting, quite the opposite, that the dominoes were not all the same size, shape and color, that the loss of South Vietnam might have less impact outside the immediate Indochinese peninsula, that the other countries reacted to very different political pressures, and that Vietnamese nationalism, left over from the colonial war, which was the principal force aiding the Vietcong in Vietnam, might have no effect in a country which had not undergone a colonial experience. But the McNamara position did not take into account the aftereffects of the French war which might make Vietnamese Communism different; instead, Communism was some great force which was sweeping right across a wide area," (Chapter 17, p. 433).

"Very subtly in the late winter and into the early spring of 1964, a change began to take place within the government and the bureaucracy. It was something which was not announced, but Vietnam gradually became a more sensitive, more delicate, and more dangerous subject. As such it became something spoken about less and less, the decisions became more and more closely held, and the principals became even more guarded with whom they spoke on the subject," (Chapter 18, p. 440).

"Therefore, in 1964 each man saw his own estimates as the deciding ones, pulling from the contradictions of Administration rhetoric what he wanted to believe. If a person was dovish, then he was dovish for forceful reasons, and he assumed that the principals were probably dovish too; and if he was hawkish, he assumed that he could control events. It was a time when the play became more and more closely held by the principals, and that as doubts about the future grew, the willingness to discuss them and share them diminished; as they grew more serious, the doubts became more private than public, as in the case of John McNaughton," (Chapter 18, p. 487).

"But he still had to deal with the question of the Congress as far as Vietnam was concerned. He wanted that extra protection before he went into the campaign. At the end of July he got his way; an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin provided the factor of patriotism that he had sought for his congressional resolution. It was to be called the Tonkin Gulf incident, and in reality it had begun back in January, when the President and his top advisors gave permission to General Krulak and the restless JCS to go ahead and plan a series of covert activities against the North under the general code name of 34A. These would be run from Saigon under the command of General Harkins (though of course the Vietnamese would be nominally in command), and the purpose would be to make Hanoi pay a little to for its pressure on the South, to hit back at the enemy, to raise morale in the South, to show Hanoi we were just as tough as they were, that we understood the game of dirty tricks and could play it just as well as they did. (Which, of course, we could not)," (Chapter 19, p. 496).

"He and Ho Chi Minh, out there alone, in a shoot-out. He would find Ho's price, Ho's weakness, whether it was through bombing the North or through threatening to use troops and the offering Ho a lollipop, massive economic aid and regional development, a Mekong river Delta development project. This time he would find himself dealing with a man who was a true revolutionary, incorruptible, a man who had no price, or at least no price that Lyndon Johnson with his Western bombs and Western dollars could meet. But it would take him quite a while to find out that he had met his match. For a long time he thought that he could handle Ho the way he handled senators and bureaucrats, and opponents. Put a little squeeze on him, touch him up a little, then Ho would see the light, now whom he was dealing with and accept the lollipop," (Chapter 20, p. 532).

"If the Kennedy Administration had come to power to be the rationalizers of the great new liberal Democratic empire, then they had found the perfect general; their social and academic hubris was matched by his military self-confidence. His were not the attitudes of a man about to be deterred from his path by a little peasant revolutionary Army. Not in the American century," (Chapter 21, pp. 583-584).

"Ideally, we should tell Khanh that we would begin to bomb for him and the South Vietnamese if he could show the United States that he was ready for it and brought a new era of stability to Saigon. Thus the bombing was a political lever, a reward; if they were good and cleaned up their house, we would bomb, and show out greater willingness to commit ourselves. Of course the one lesson the Vietnamese leaders had learned over a decade was that the United States was willing to put in. As if to confirm this, the same Taylor message also told Washington that perhaps January 1 would be too late, in which case the United States would go ahead anyway and simply hope that Khanh would come around," (Chapter 22, p. 587).

"Bob McNamara was not blindly optimistic (later, after it had all failed, he would tell this reporter that he had always doubted the bombing, that anyone who knew anything about bombing in World War Ii would be dubious about what it would accomplish, a startling admission from a man who had urged the bombing to the President as forcefully as he did), but it was more likely to work than not. It was worth trying, and if it didn't work out, it could always be stopped. Thus the later frustration of McNamara, who

would always favor whatever bombing halt was being proposed, wanting at once to negotiate but unable to give Hanoi terms under which it would negotiate, offering instead terms which for Hanoi meant surrender," (Chapter 23, p. 624).

"It was a very big story, and within minutes the wire services were carrying it. At the White House, where the AP and UPI tickers were lodged, the press corps and Lyndon Johnson saw the stories at almost the same time. Johnson went into one of his wildest rages," (Chapter 25, p. 712).

"Westmoreland would get everything he wanted. Well, almost everything. That was the decision. Of course, right from the start there was a decision against the reserves, which meant that there had to be considerable juggling of the units already ticketed for Vietnam, and some units would arrive later than expected. But still, he would get anything he wanted. He wanted a lot, of course. He saw it as a major war, a real war, their first-line united against our first line units, a long struggle, perhaps two or three better years of fighting, and then a trailing down," (Chapter 26, p. 730).

"War had not become any less costly in the ensuing eleven years, particularly a war whose principal architects felt it could all be accomplished by expensive technology and modern military machinery, a war part of whose purpose was to spare Western, if not Asian, lives, a war in which the most expensive new helicopters replaced tanks. So the cost of the war would soon become one more public relations problem for the President," (Chapter 27, p. 732).

"For McNamara, the great dream had been of controlling the Pentagon and the arms race, but the war had ruined all that. War Secretaries do not limit the power of the military, and to a large degree he had lost control. The war absorbed so much of his time, his energy, his credibility, that he had little to give to the kind of controls he might have wanted. It was not by accident that his name would come more to symbolize the idea of technological warfare than it would civilian control of military," (Epilogue, p. 798).

"But if there was not a coup, it marked the end of our total belief that Diem and Diem alone could be the instrument of American policy, a blind commitment to one irrational family. In the struggle within the American government it seemed that for the moment the civilian forces were dominant, though there were varying degrees of doubt among the civilians about whether a coup could be staged at all. Some, like Forrestal and to an increasing degree Robert Kennedy, were more and more dubious about the whole thing, while Rusk and Lodge, for instance, viewed an overthrow of the Diem regime as advantageous, as a way of winning the war," (Chapter 13, p. 325).

Topics for Discussion

What were the problems that Kennedy faced in selecting a Secretary of State?

Who were the main characters in the Kennedy administration? Why were they considered to be the elite?

How did the World War II peace conference decisions determine the fate of Indochina?

Due to his age and inexperience, President John F. Kennedy felt a need to prove his toughness. How did this affect the decisions he made?

What was the domino theory? How did it affect U.S. policy in Indochina?

What was 34A and how did it lead to the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin and the passage of the Tonkin Resolution?

What factors led to the escalation of the war?

What factors did the United States ignore in making their decisions regarding Vietnam?

Why did the intelligence community feel that the bombings would not be effective in achieving the U.S. goal of forcing the North into negotiations?