

1995

Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers

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Recommended Citation

Kingseed, Cole C. (1995) "Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 48 : No. 3 , Article 23.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol48/iss3/23>

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efforts to provide a "down the throat" capability, via the semiactive radar homing version of the Sidewinder missile, in response to the operational desires of the fleet pilots (this reviewer included) for that edge in any engagement, day or night—creating the impression that real fighter pilots do not need or want that edge.

I also have problems with Stevenson's attacks on the veracity or accuracy of certain statements by Admirals Burke, Holloway, and Turner, Captain Stiedle, and others. I consider these *ad hominem* in nature, where the author expresses his resentment of that tactic when used against "mafia" members. However, I agree with Stevenson that the issues should be settled on the evidence, not by casting aspersions at opponents' assumed motives. I believe he would have made a better case for his views had he been consistent with this notion throughout this book.

My concerns aside, I think this book is a valuable contribution to improving the defense acquisition process, and I recommend it: not as a sole source, but as an addition to one's library, as an unapologetic expression of a singular point of view.

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Barrett, David. *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers*.

Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas,
1993. 296pp. \$35

America's participation in the Vietnam War is widely viewed as a monumental

mistake in the conduct of foreign policy. That this country became involved in a major war on the Asian landmass seems nearly incomprehensible when examined with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight. Yet Lyndon Johnson pursued a policy that appeared to him both coherent and consistent with this nation's political objectives. David Barrett explores the interaction between the president and his circle of advisers, and he questions the traditional interpretation that Johnson's penchant for secrecy shielded him from consultation with a wide range of formal and informal counselors.

In this study of the Johnson White House, Barrett traces the evolution from 1965 to 1968 of the president's circle of Vietnam War advisers. His purpose is twofold: the first is to examine the interactions among those "uncertain warriors," by way of explaining why America fought in terrain described as "the most unfavorable place in Asia to fight a war." Secondly, Barrett seeks to prompt a new understanding of Johnson, whom he terms "one of the most complex presidents." Using a plethora of primary sources, including memoranda, letters, diaries, and memoirs, the author portrays an extremely energetic chief executive who valued consultation but fashioned his decisions on an increasingly outdated worldview. The result was a series of decisions by Johnson that resulted in the choice of escalation as the most viable strategy for achieving political and military victory. Not surprisingly, the president paid particular attention to the hawks on his advisory team (Robert

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McNamara, Dean Rusk, and Dean Acheson); they proclaimed the premises and conclusions of the "domino theory," which Johnson himself shared—that if South Vietnam fell, its neighbors would inevitably fall also.

Barrett is at his best in describing the July 1965 decision to increase substantially the number of American ground forces in Vietnam. Reaching beyond the formal foreign policy advisers, Johnson also consulted a number of informal consultants, such as Senators Richard Russell, Mike Mansfield, and William Fulbright, former president Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Though some cautioned against increasing involvement, most accepted the domino theory, which was, in the author's words, "quite orthodox in 1965."

Barrett's coverage of the 1967 decision to grant Westmoreland's request for an additional one hundred thousand troops is less complete, since many documents remain classified. Still, he has enough material to present an image of Johnson as a president fully cognizant of public opinion polls, congressional sentiment, and the views of the Washington elite. As antiwar sentiment rose, however, Johnson shrouded his options in secrecy until he made the decision to reinforce Westmoreland. Secrecy was the result of his growing fear that leaks to the press might undermine his policy. Barrett maintains that the controversy in 1967 was not about whether the United States should prosecute the military op-

tion, but rather about the costliness of the means to that end.

Johnson's penchant for secrecy also produced disastrous effects in 1968, when the Tet offensive caught the nation and Congress unprepared. Accustomed to optimistic reports and executive announcements that the United States was winning the war, opposition to Johnson erupted violently with the coverage of the fighting in Saigon and Hue. Archival evidence strongly suggests that among the president's advisers the view became widespread that further escalation was no longer a viable strategy. Johnson's subsequent decision not to seek reelection was the result of the sheer accumulation of sentiment against the war among his advisers, the news media, public opinion, and Congress.

Barrett has produced a highly provocative study that examines Lyndon Johnson's national security apparatus and decision-making process. The author succeeds admirably in portraying a president who valued advice, both informal and formal, from a wide range of people. That tragic consequences flowed from the actions of rational, well intentioned leaders is not so surprising when one considers that the majority of policy makers and the American public in 1965 fully accepted a vision of a new world order founded on a doctrine of global containment.

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