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The United States and Vietnam, 1787-1941

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should be the domain of the military commanders. This was certainly not the case in the Vietnam War.

In the late 1960s, during the war's greatest escalation, nearly all military decisions (in many cases down to the tactical level) were made by the secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, or President Johnson. The decisionmaking process that governed the military operations was so cumbersome that simple aircraft target lists would often encounter delays of three weeks pending approval from the White House. Military commanders in the field often had no latitude or flexibility in how they fought or where, especially regarding air and naval operations against North Vietnam. McNamara's unrealistic, uncoordinated, and continual interference in all levels of military operations may be the single greatest influence on why the United States lost the war. Morrison states that "McNamara's plan for graduated response . . . was doomed from the start. It was a no-win position that resolved nothing either politically or militarily." There was certainly no resolve, or unity of effort. McNamara simply did not understand the nature of war or how to conduct one. Unfortunately, neither did the politicians around him, nor were they willing to listen to sound military advice from the Pentagon.

In contrast to the high-level political intrigues, Morrison has given, through their words and deeds, the view of the war of many marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen of all ranks

who served in that war. Throughout are marvelous anecdotes of Medal of Honor actions that bring war's reality directly into the reader's heart.

Supported by numerous photographs and seven maps, *The Elephant and the Tiger* is much better than General Phillip Davidson's *Vietnam at War* (1988) or Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam* (1984). This book is well worth the price and the time to read it. Although unstated, the moral of this work on the Vietnam War could be: For every complex and difficult problem there is a simple and easy solution—which is always wrong!

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Miller, Robert Hopkins. *The United States and Vietnam, 1787-1941*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense Univ. Press, 1990. 324pp. \$10

In the tradition of such distinguished scholar-diplomats as Edwin Reischauer and George F. Kennan, Ambassador Miller has written a much-needed history of early U.S. involvement with an important Asian nation.

The first half of Miller's book, dealing with the U.S.-Vietnamese relationship in the nineteenth century, is largely terra incognita even for Southeast Asia scholars. Miller documents several diplomatic initiatives by the United States in this period to establish trade relations with the Vietnamese, initiatives which failed

ultimately because they involved “two distant cultures talking past each other.” The author also traces the lengthy if somewhat fainthearted and ultimately stillborn U.S. efforts to mediate the dispute between China and France over the French seizure of Tonkin.

The second part of the book deals with the diplomacy revolving around Japan’s advance into China and particularly into Indochina in the years prior to Pearl Harbor. While Miller’s extensive research in the State Department archives turned up little that is new, the focus from a Vietnam perspective on the runup to World War II is interesting. In Vichy-controlled and Japanese-occupied Vietnam, U.S. opposition to both Japanese and German conquests coincided. An area that had been of only marginal interest to the United States for 150 years suddenly became the focus of attention to Washington policy-makers, not for any intrinsic value but because of the threat it represented in the hands of the Japanese to a perceived vital interest, China. Japan’s tightening grip on Vietnam in 1941 was a major obstacle to Japanese-U.S. discussions and led American leaders to take seriously at last the possibility of war with Japan.

Pari passu this book also raises a number of interesting counterfactual questions: what if the United States had not stuck so long to its policies of “principled non-interference” and “parallel but independent” action in Asia but had instead been prepared to listen to appeals from European

colonial powers to act in concert or at least make a commitment that the Japanese might construe as threatening the use of force? Would the Japanese have then been deterred, and for how long? Could Japan have created a serious political problem for the United States and the allies if it had seized French, Dutch, and British colonies in Asia, but left Hawaii and the Philippines alone? On the other hand, if Japan had been prepared to do a deal with our European allies, would they have sold out China to avoid war in Asia and, with luck keep their colonies? While we cannot know the answers to these questions, Miller is certainly right in concluding that “the inability or unwillingness of the United States to oppose Japan’s southward expansion discouraged the European colonial powers from devoting a higher priority to protecting their colonial possessions in the Far East, especially in the face of the German menace to Europe. This made the Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia virtually inevitable.”

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Noble, Dennis L. *The Eagle and the Dragon: The United States Military in China, 1901-1937*. New York: Greenwood, 1990. 219pp. \$39.95
American military men have served in many areas around the world for over two hundred years. Few duty stations, however, have involved the cultural dilemmas and complexity of mission that the Middle Kingdom presented