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The Limits of Intervention

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Hoopes, Townsend. *The Limits of Intervention*. New York: McKay, 1969. 245p.

This book will provoke a great deal of soul searching (as well as heartburn, perhaps) about one of the most controversial and painful events of these times—the conflict in Southeast Asia. Those tempted to jump to the conclusion that this is merely one more predictably critical and “agonizing” reappraisal of American involvement in the Vietnamese war would be dead wrong. This book is written by someone who should know what he is talking about. The author was close—but not so close as to impair perspective and balance—to the highly placed persons and the decisions of those fateful last 4 years of President Johnson’s tenure. From 1965 to 1969 Townsend Hoopes served in the Department of Defense, first as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and then as Under Secretary of the Air Force. But his previous experience in Government dates from 1947 and extended to 1953, with service under four Secretaries of Defense, beginning with James Forrestal.

Mr. Hoopes calls his book “an inside account of how the Johnson policy of escalation in Vietnam was reversed.” This it is, and much more besides. Hoopes presents a picture of well-meaning civilian and military leaders so enmeshed in that fantastically complicated web called the “Vietnam situation” that at times they appear to be operating at some mysterious level far removed from reality. The author describes the dilemma of some courageous souls in the Government hierarchy who tried to point out to their superiors that the events in Vietnam were not what the President was being told they were. Although the shock of the 1968 Tet offensive finally precipitated policy changes, it did not really alter the convictions of everyone

in the Government with high-level responsibilities connected with the Vietnamese war. Some of the most fascinating parts of the book are those dealing with the pull and tug of personalities either trying radically to reverse the direction of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia or insisting on going along with more of the same. Where some of the more famous American policymakers and advisers stood on the issue—that distinguished cold war warrior Dean Acheson, for example—may provide some surprises.

In a muted but unmistakable way, Hoopes labels the heroes and villains and/or guided or misguided officials, with the most serious criticisms being directed at civilian makers of Vietnam policy. The military also receive their share of censure: Hoopes has some serious misgivings regarding the wisdom exercised by various American military men. One example concerns the military’s “can do” spirit, which he admires. At the same time, Hoopes deplors their “corollary reluctance” critically to analyze their rationale for plans and actions. This, he states, emphasizes the “vital need for wise and disinterested civilian direction and control of policy.”

According to the author, the person who more than anyone else was able to swing President Johnson away from the path of escalation in Vietnam to the momentous decision (on 31 March 1968) to deescalate the conflict and simultaneously ask Hanoi to “respond positively, and favorably, to this new step for peace” was Secretary of State Clark Clifford. Mr. McNamara’s successor emerges as a man who not only was able to exercise calm and balanced judgment but, more importantly, also had the courage to speak his mind to a President who was not particularly noted for suffering contrary points of view gracefully. There is a great deal more to this well-written work than has been said

here. The only way to get the full benefit is by reading it. Whether one comes away from this volume with a sense of strong agreement or with sharp dissent with its main themes, one will not come away with a feeling of time wasted. Few works can provide more understanding of such a wide range of political-military matters having absolute relevance to all Americans—especially those in the military—than *The Limits of Intervention*.

J.N. LACCETTI, LCOL, U.S. Army

Salisbury, Harrison E. *War between Russia and China*. New York: Norton, 1969. 224p.

A majority of Americans probably view the recent signs of conflict between the Soviet Union and China with equanimity or even hopeful anticipation. Not so Harrison Salisbury, the long-time *New York Times* Moscow correspondent. His view is that the Soviet Union and China are nuclear superpowers, and any war between them will be a nuclear war that will involve the United States. He is particularly concerned because he feels that if events are permitted to continue in the present pattern, war will become inevitable. Most of the book is devoted to establishing this point. Tracing Russian-Chinese relations from the time of Genghis Khan in the 13th century, Mr. Salisbury highlights the major conflicts that have characterized the relationship for over 600 years. The analysis is especially interesting and valuable because it is based upon the author's personal contacts and observations during extensive travels in Asia (in particular his May 1969 visit to Mongolia), in addition to historical research. Unfortunately, the weakest part of this book is the proposed solution. Once again it is the United States that is expected to make the overtures and concessions and bear the expenses—part of the solution being a massive food program for China. It is unlikely that

the American people would support Mr. Salisbury's proposals. It is even more doubtful that the Soviet Union and China would agree. The book concludes somewhat naively by holding out the prospect of lasting world peace and harmony if the United States takes the recommended action.

In spite of this shortcoming, *War between Russia and China* is recommended to all military officers. Reflecting the author's long experience as a newspaperman, the book is written in a crisp, lucid style. As a result, the reader can quickly gain an excellent grasp of the causes and ramifications of the crisis in Central Asia.

E.H. STEENTOFTE, CDR, U.S. Navy

Schlaifer, Robert. *Analysis of Decisions under Uncertainty*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969. 729p.

This book represents a rather substantial revision of the author's earlier popular text, *Probability and Statistics for Business Decisions*. Both books are concerned with the general subject of decision problems under conditions of uncertainty. The primary distinguishing characteristic of this revision is the explicit attention given to large-scale problems in which risk aversion is an important consideration. As in the case of the previous book, this was written as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate business school students. Thus, the material is presented in an integrated manner, and, in contrast to a reference book, it is difficult to gain much from this work without proceeding sequentially through it.

Schlaifer has divided the material into three major sections. Part I, entitled "Foundations," examines the basic principles one should apply in dealing with decision problems under uncertainty. It includes a description of the "decision tree" methodology and a discussion of the differences between a decisionmaker's preferences for possible courses of action and his judgments