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**Tempered by war: the military experiences of Vietnam decision-makers**

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Kennedy

The Second World War was the last US war that mobilized a full generation of men into combat. The veterans of the war went on to fill roles across US society and were conspicuous in successive US administrations' national security bureaucracies, including the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations during the escalation years of the US war in Vietnam. The political value of an executive branch boasting military experience was not lost on President Kennedy, himself a decorated veteran, who declared in his inaugural address on 20 January 1961,

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans, born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.<sup>1</sup>

For Kennedy, those entering office in 1961 understood hardship, service, and sacrifice, which equipped them with the fortitude required to meet the challenges facing the United States. Kennedy's nod to 'a new generation' collectivized the benefits of military service beyond his administration to American society more broadly, but it also flattened the variety of experiences that characterized the American war effort. While the benefits to American society of the tempering effect of war were pluralized, the tangible manifestations of those experiences were particularized in policy debates. As we show in this paper, those who were 'tempered by war' were tempered in different ways and to varying degrees.

It was 20 years ago, and in the pages of this journal, that Andrew Preston made a deceptively simple, but nevertheless groundbreaking, contribution to the field of Vietnam War history. He suggested that a neat dichotomy between hawks and doves might not apply to the Vietnam War and introduced into the lexicon a new term of 'soft hawks' to identify those that straddled the divide, who neither argued for withdrawal from Vietnam nor full-scale military intervention. Our analysis builds on his work and challenges another dichotomy, that between veterans and civilians. A key foundation of civil-military relations literature is the understanding 'that there is something called civilian and that it is different

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter JFKL), accessed 15 December 2019, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/inaugural-address>.

from the thing called military.’<sup>2</sup> This theoretical simplicity, however, camouflages the variety of military experiences. The differences in wartime experience of the men who staffed the foreign policy machinery of the administrations of Kennedy and his successor, Johnson, mattered.

Political science literature on civil-military relations is helpful to predicting *how* being a veteran might influence policy preferences on the use of force. However, the presence of so many veterans in government did not bring about any uniformity in policy as this literature predicts. For the most part, this literature suggests that veterans tend to be more restrained when deciding whether to use force: they are ‘reluctant warriors’ against more interventionist civilians.<sup>3</sup> When *in war* however, these scholars tell us, veterans tend to have views that ‘track more closely with military officers than civilians who never served in the military,’<sup>4</sup> and are more hawkish about the application of force.<sup>5</sup> By investigating the military service of Vietnam-era policymakers, assessing how they referred to that service while in government, and placing their personal preferences into the policy debates around the prosecution of the Vietnam War, we conclude that veteran status was not a binary quality. Military experience

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<sup>2</sup> Peter D. Feaver, ‘Civil-Military Relations,’ *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 228.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Richard H. Kohn, ‘Coming Soon: A Crisis in Civil-Military Relations,’ *World Affairs* 170, no. 3 (2008), 69-80; Mary Perry, *The Pentagon’s War: The Military’s Undeclared War against American Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Stefano Reccia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors: US Civil-Military Relations and Multilateral Intervention* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014). Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Michael Mandelbaum, ‘Foreign Policy as Social Work,’ *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (1996), 16-33; Russell F. Weigley, ‘The American Civil-Military Cultural Gap: A Historical Perspective, Colonial Times to the Present,’ in Feaver and Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians*.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Gelpi and Peter D. Feaver, ‘Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick? Veterans in the Political Elite and the American Use of Force,’ *The American Political Science Review* 96, no. 4 (December 2002), 779.

<sup>5</sup> Feaver and Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles*, 68; David H. Petraeus, ‘Military Influence and the post-Vietnam Use of Force,’ *Armed Forces and Society* 15, no. 4 (1989), 489-505; Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen and Cold War Crises*, 1-5; Deborah D. Avant, ‘Are the reluctant warriors out of control? Why the US military is averse to responding to post-Cold War low-level threats,’ *Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (1996), 51-90. By contrast, Roger Hilsman wrote in 1962 that the mirror opposite was true of the military: ‘[They] beat their chests until it comes down to do some fighting and then they start backing down.’ Quoted in McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 8.

affected and shaped the politics and policy of government officials in more complicated ways.

Our contribution adds a layer to historical work on Vietnam decision-makers by considering more systematically how wartime experience shaped their perspectives. Existing historical work on these men - they were all men<sup>6</sup> - has tended to treat their military experience as a side-note, if at all.<sup>7</sup> H.R. McMaster, himself a veteran, for instance, has acknowledged that most of the decision-makers around Vietnam had served in the war in some capacity, but he handled their experiences as a series of vignettes.<sup>8</sup> Some historians have considered wartime experience as currency: those with longer military careers or with a certain type of military experience commanded greater esteem in policy debates on the use of force, as compared to those who felt a relative lack of comparable experience as a vulnerability or shortcoming. Historians have singled out President Johnson and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy for their ‘contrived’ toughness<sup>9</sup> and their tendency to favor aggressive responses to compensate for their lack of direct experience in war.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Kennedy’s confidence and willingness to challenge military officials is credited to his own heroic conduct in war.<sup>11</sup> Arthur Schlesinger described how ‘the war experience helped give

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<sup>6</sup> On the relevance of masculinity and shared social and cultural baggage, see for instance: Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> With the obvious exception of biographies. For instance, on Robert McNamara: Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (New York: Little Brown, 1993); Henry L. Trewhitt, *McNamara* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). On Walt Rostow: David Milne, *America’s Rasputin* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2009). On Dean Rusk: Thomas W. Zeiler, *Dean Rusk: Defending the American Mission Abroad* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Thomas J. Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy and Johnson Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988). On McGeorge Bundy, see, for example: Kai Bird, *The Color Of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> George Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 11; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> On Lyndon Johnson, see, for instance: Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012). On Robert Kennedy, see, for instance: Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Larry Tye, *Bobby Kennedy: the Making of a Liberal Icon* (New York: Random House, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Paul B. Fay, *The Pleasure of His Company* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Kenneth P. O’Donnell, David F. Powers and Joe McCarthy, *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970); David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York:

the New Frontier generation its casual and laconic tone, its grim, puncturing humor and its mistrust of evangelism.’<sup>12</sup>

As a group, the Vietnam-era decision-makers spanned the range of possible wartime experiences and disagreed on the use of force in Vietnam. For instance, Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy’s advisor and speechwriter, had been a conscientious objector and went on to oppose the use of force in Vietnam. Another dove, W. Averell Harriman, worked in the State Department from 1961 and was a senior diplomat during the war. William Colby, who served as the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) chief of station in Saigon and rose through the agency’s ranks as the war dragged on, had been a member of the elite Jedburgh teams in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Europe and was particularly enthusiastic about pacification programs in Vietnam.

Archival examples abound of advisors drawing on their experiences in the armed forces to present expert authoritative knowledge of war generally, and of Vietnam specifically. Alongside this claim to expertise, wartime experience served a performative value as well. One advisor to Undersecretary of State George Ball – a noted dove – remembered that ‘he must have mentioned [his experience on the Strategic Bombing Survey] fifty times’ to justify his dissent on Vietnam policy, especially his opposition to the bombing program over North Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy offered President Johnson a sweeping, condemnatory assessment of military planning, buttressing his criticism with a reminder of his own time as an Army intelligence officer. In January 1965, he wrote: ‘The Army is running it in a regulation way, and that means that we have too much staff, too much administration, too much clerical work, too much reporting, too much rotation, and not enough action. (I was an Army staff officer for three years, so this is not just imagination.)’<sup>14</sup> Walt W. Rostow, who succeeded Bundy at the National Security Council, saw fit to remind colleagues and superiors of his own wartime experiences when

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Ballantine Books, 1969); Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and Kennedy Prolonged the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); David Kaiser, *Kennedy, Johnson and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Greenwich House, 1983), 212.

<sup>13</sup> David L. DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam and Rethinking Containment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 22.

<sup>14</sup> McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, 4 January 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. II: Vietnam, January-June 1965, doc. 2, accessed 26 June 2019, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d2>.

introducing policy recommendations. In a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in April 1965, for example, he began, ‘Bob: I’m an old pro in this field. I could be wrong; but I think I’m right.’<sup>15</sup>

While there are dozens of government officials worthy of attention, our study focuses on three case studies that span the range of civilian views during the escalatory period of the Vietnam War, and that represent three different types of wartime experience. As case studies, they are, by definition, meant to be illustrative rather than comprehensive. The first, Walt Rostow, was Director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff and then Johnson’s National Security Advisor. During the war, he served in the OSS and United States Army Air Forces (USAAF). Rostow was unambiguously hawkish in the Vietnam policy debates.<sup>16</sup> The second case study, Roger Hilsman, was Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in the Kennedy administration, and had served as an infantry officer in the United States Army and then in the OSS in Burma. Hilsman was decidedly more dovish than Rostow and one of Preston’s ‘soft hawks’. The third, John T. McNaughton, was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA) under Johnson, had served in the United States Naval Reserve, and his dovishness/hawkishness could be situated somewhere between the other two.<sup>17</sup>

Rostow, Hilsman and McNaughton were selected as the subjects of our case studies for a number of reasons. First, they occupied different points on the hawk-dove spectrum and the importance of their formative experiences is evident in their recommendations for Vietnam. Put together, they suggest that military experience in and of itself is less informative than the nature of that military experience. Second, rich source material is now available for all three men, which allows us to more fully capture their wartime experiences. Rostow and Hilsman both wrote about their wartime service – in essays and a memoir respectively – and their OSS materials were recently declassified. In McNaughton’s case, the

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<sup>15</sup> Walt Rostow to Robert McNamara, 1 April 1965, Folder: Southeast Asia, Box 13, Rostow Papers, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (hereafter LBJL).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Preston, ‘The Soft Hawks Dilemma in Vietnam: Michael V. Forrestal at the National Security Council, 1962-1964,’ *The International History Review* 25, no. 1 (March 2003), 63-95.

<sup>17</sup> Aurélie Basha i Novosejt, *I Made Mistakes: Robert McNamara’s Vietnam War Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Benjamin T. Harrison and Christopher L. Mosher, ‘John T. McNaughton and Vietnam: The Early Years as Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1964-1965,’ *History* 92, no. 308 (October 2007), 496-514; Lawrence Freedman, ‘Vietnam and the Disillusioned Strategist,’ *International Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1996), 133-51.

recent recovery of his personal diaries have facilitated new understandings into his wartime experience and Vietnam decision-making.

The three advisors suggest that military experience *per se* mattered less than first, proximity to actual combat and second, what we call socialization, or the process and extent to which these men adopted the doctrines and mindset of the agency or branch of the armed services in which they served. On the first point, those who saw close combat – of our case studies, Hilsman especially – were more wary of relying on military power and thus closer to the political science caricature of ‘reluctant warriors.’ On the second point, while some exhibited enduring institutional viewpoints and were inclined to believe that ‘their’ branch of the armed services had played an important role in the Second World War and thus could so again in Vietnam, others inherited a suspicious outlook on the military.

### **Walt W. Rostow**

As National Security Advisor and a senior cabinet member throughout the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Walt Rostow earned the moniker of ‘Air Marshall Rostow.’ His colleagues described him as the ‘most aggressive civilian member’ of the cabinet,<sup>18</sup> a ‘big bomb man,’<sup>19</sup> and, less generously, a ‘menace.’<sup>20</sup> He favored hawkish operations more consistently than most other civilian advisors and was a fervent proponent of the bombing of North Vietnam, which he argued could win the war. His case is particularly instructive for understanding how wartime service shaped policy preferences because his recommendations for Vietnam can be traced so clearly to his experiences during the Second World War as an advisor on the Allied bombing campaign. As the journalist David Halberstam noted, ‘perhaps all men tend to be frozen in certain attitudes which have been shaped by important experiences in their formative years. For young Rostow, one of the crucial experiences had

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<sup>18</sup> David Milne, ‘Our equivalent of guerrilla warfare: Walt Rostow and the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1961-1968,’ *Journal of Military History* 71, no. 1 (January 2007), 169. However, where Milne focuses on Rostow’s writings as the source of his ideas on bombing, we suggest the intellectual lineage is even clearer with his experience in the Second World War though obviously the two are not entirely distinguishable. Milne, *America’s Rasputin*, 31-34.

<sup>19</sup> Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton private diary (hereafter McNaughton diary), 18 May 1966.

<sup>20</sup> McNaughton diary, 1 April 1966.



been picking targets in Europe... For the rest of his life, he remained uniquely oblivious to counterarguments about bombing.<sup>21</sup>

During the Second World War, as a promising young economist, Rostow was assigned to a sub-section of the OSS called the Enemy Objectives Unit (EOU). The unit supported the Allied bombing campaign by applying quantitative analyses to industrial targets in Nazi Germany and ranking them. The EOU provided a rich evidence base for advocates of US strategic bombing doctrines and proponents of the creation of an independent US Air Force.<sup>22</sup> At the time, heated debates were taking place over the use of air power within and between military branches and international allies.<sup>23</sup> Rostow and his EOU colleagues supported daylight precision targeting, which was designed to leverage new technology to attack industrial targets and to demonstrate the emergence of a 'science' of bombing that was amenable to quantification.<sup>24</sup> Quantification, for Rostow and the EOU, would facilitate more effective tactical bombing, and allow for a more concentrated deployment of aircraft, personnel and ordnance than the heavy strategic bombing preferred by strategists who focused on attacking the less palpable target of German morale.<sup>25</sup> The debates of 1943-44 period, when Rostow was stationed in London, determined not only how the war in the Pacific would be waged, but also laid the foundations for the use of air power in future conflicts.<sup>26</sup> Rostow gleaned the lesson that bombing, combined with good intelligence and quantified targeting, could win wars.<sup>27</sup>

Rostow was only one of many Vietnam-era decision makers involved in the interlocking agencies concerned with the bombing programs of the Second World War.

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<sup>21</sup> David Halberstam quoted in Clayton Laurie, 'Rostow's Panacea: Strategic Air Power, the OSS Enemy Objectives Unit, and the Origins of ROLLING THUNDER,' *War & Society* 27, no. 1 (May 2008), 113-14.

<sup>22</sup> Walt W. Rostow, 'The London Operation: Recollections of an Economist,' in George C. Chalou (ed.), *The Secrets War: The Office of Strategic Services in World War II* (Washington DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), 51-53.

<sup>23</sup> See especially: 'United States Army Air Forces in Europe, May 1941-May 1945; A Summary of Plans, Policies, Administration and Operations,' 8 May 1948, Box 8, Curtis E. LeMay Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>24</sup> Laurie, 'Rostow's Panacea,' 110-12; Walt W. Rostow 'Waging Economic Warfare from London,' (Winter 1991), 11-132-4, Series: Articles from 'Studies in Intelligence,' RG263 Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

<sup>25</sup> Military Analysis Division: Army and Army Air Section, *The United States Strategic Bombing Survey: The Strategic Air Operation of Very Heavy Bombardment in the War against Japan* (Washington DC: GPO, 1946).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Rostow, 'The London Operation,' 51-53.

Curtis LeMay, who rose through the ranks of the USAAF during the war, led the Eighth Army Air Force in Europe and eventually the strategic bombing campaign against Japan.<sup>28</sup> Assigned to LeMay's command was a young Robert McNamara,<sup>29</sup> who oversaw statistical analyses, and Nicholas de Belleville Katzenbach,<sup>30</sup> a navigator on B-25 bombers who spent over two years in German POW camps after his aircraft was shot down. Several more Vietnam decision-makers participated in the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), a civilian-led initiative to assess the impact of the bombing program over Germany that ran between November 1944 and July 1946. They included Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze,<sup>31</sup> George Ball and Ambassador and famed economist John K. Galbraith,<sup>32</sup> who acted as the Survey's co-directors. Above all, the USSBS was, as one historian has noted, 'an effort by strategic bombing advocates to establish their craft as the ultimate arbiter of all future wars' and especially to 'demystify the nuclear bomb' as another weapon in the US arsenal.<sup>33</sup> During his time on the USBSS in Germany and then Japan, Nitze had manipulated intelligence to reinforce his defense of bombing as a decisive tool in future wars and therefore of the value of an independent Air Force.<sup>34</sup> Galbraith disagreed, and considered the strategic bombing campaign to have been a 'disastrous failure.'<sup>35</sup> Alongside Ball, he

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<sup>28</sup> Chief of Staff of the Air Force (1961-65) and 'more than any other figure, [the man who] shaped the Strategic Air Command (SAC) during its formative years under his command.' Richard H. Kohn and Joseph B. Harahan, 'US Strategic Air Power, 1948-1962: Excerpts from an Interview with Generals Curtis E. LeMay, Leon W. Johnson, David A. Burchinal, and Jack J. Catton,' *International Security* 12, no. 4 (Spring 1988), 79. See also Kenneth H. Williams, *LeMay on Vietnam* (Washington DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Secretary of Defense (1961-68). For his recollections of LeMay and service in the war, see *Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* transcript, accessed 26 November 2019, [http://www.erroldmorris.com/film/fow\\_transcript.html](http://www.erroldmorris.com/film/fow_transcript.html); Basha i Novosejt, *I Made Mistakes*, 33, 39.

<sup>30</sup> US Attorney General (1965-66), Undersecretary of State (1966-69).

<sup>31</sup> Who later became Director of Policy Planning at the State Department (1950-53), Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (1961-63); Secretary of the Navy (1963-67) and Deputy Secretary of Defense (1967-69).

<sup>32</sup> Ambassador to India (1961-63), Counsellor to the President.

<sup>33</sup> Robert P. Newman, 'Ending the War with Japan: Paul Nitze's 'Early Surrender' Counterfactual,' *Pacific Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (May 1995), 167-94.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Gian P. Gentile, *Investigating Oneself: The United States Air Force and Its Evaluation of Air Power in War and Conflict* (Fort Leavenworth: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1999). For a kinder view, see: John K. McMullen, *The United States Strategic Bombing Survey and Air Force Doctrine* (Thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Gentile, *Investigating Oneself*, 6.

concluded that bombing had, in fact, streamlined the Germany economy. For them, the ground offensive, more than strategic bombing, was decisive in ending the war.

Debates over the use of aerial force in the 1960s rehashed the arguments of the 1940s. Just as in the Second World War, these debates hinged on the special stake of the Air Force in justifying its *raison d'être* in new wars.<sup>36</sup> But where some men shared similar wartime experiences, their policy preferences did not necessarily accord. Rostow and Ball demonstrated different degrees of affiliation and socialization to the air power doctrines of their branch of service. While Rostow remained a staunch advocate for the effectiveness of air power – specifically bombing operations – Ball was a harsh critic and remained skeptical of Air Force dogma from the outset. Although Nitze and Galbraith were relatively quiet in the most heated debates of the 1960s, they were aligned with Ball and referred to their USSBS experience to argue to President Johnson that there were no industrial targets in Vietnam of any value and that bombing might, in fact, stiffen Vietnamese resolve as it had with Germany.

Rostow was virtually alone among civilian advisors in supporting LeMay's recommendations for expanding bombing targets in North Vietnam as a way of ending the war, including the mining of Haiphong Harbor, North Vietnam's main port. By 1966, McNamara and most of his civilian colleagues concluded that the 'bombing of the North [was] a 'side show' of 'minor military importance'' and Army General William Westmoreland concurred that it was 'largely irrelevant.' Rostow, however, remained unbowed.<sup>37</sup>

Although Rostow had recommended the use of bombing as early as 1961, the connections between Rostow's wartime experience and his recommendations on Vietnam were clearest during the divisive 1966 debates over whether to bomb petroleum, oil and lubricant (POL) targets in North Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> He referred to his 'considerable background of practical knowledge in the bombing business'<sup>39</sup> and to 'lessons of the Second World War'<sup>40</sup> to support bombing POL targets. Rebutting Galbraith and Ball, he argued that 'Ho Chi Minh

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Jacob Van Staaveren, *USAF Plans and Policies in South Vietnam: 1961-1963* (Washington DC: USAF Historical Liaison Office, 1965); Robert F. Futrell and Martin Blumenson, *The US Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981).

<sup>37</sup> McNaughton diary, 4 January 1966.

<sup>38</sup> Laurie, 'Rostow's Panacea,' 105.

<sup>39</sup> Walt Rostow to Dean Rusk, 1 April 1965, Folder: Southeast Asia, Box 13, Rostow Papers, LBJL.

<sup>40</sup> Laurie, 'Rostow's Panacea,' 127-28.

has an industrial complex to protect: he is no longer a guerrilla fighter with nothing to lose.’<sup>41</sup> More than that, Rostow had a special fixation on the value of oil targets. During the Second World War, his colleagues in the EOU had earned the nickname ‘the oily boys’ because of their focus on similar targets. Reflecting in the 1990s on his work at the EOU, he justified his preoccupation with POL targets in Vietnam by quoting Luftwaffe General Adolf Galland to explain that bombing of oil targets had been ‘the most important of the combined factors that brought about the collapse of Germany.’<sup>42</sup> His former USBSS colleagues disagreed.

Rostow’s example offers the clearest evidence of Peter Feaver and Christopher Gelpi’s arguments that the ‘US military is an important socialization experience that shapes individuals’ attitudes’<sup>43</sup> and that ‘civilians who are military veterans [have views] that track more closely with those of military officers.’<sup>44</sup> More than a monolithic military perspective, Rostow bought into the *Air Force* point of view. In the Second World War, he had supported the creation of an independent Air Force and his views matched those of LeMay, who was a key figure in that bureaucratic evolution. However, as Galbraith and Ball’s examples suggest, not all of Rostow’s colleagues with experience on the bombing campaign during the Second World War supported bombing over Vietnam with his enthusiasm. They were less enamored with its strategic efficacy than Rostow and did not demonstrate the same degree of institutional buy-in to the USAAF.

In addition to this socialization, Rostow’s example evidences the claim that proximity to combat is important to shaping attitudes. His colleague Nicholas Katzenbach, who became frustrated with Rostow’s support of the bombing program in Vietnam, was recorded as leaving one particularly acrimonious meeting in 1967 saying, ‘I finally understand the difference between Walt and me. I was the navigator who was shot down and spent two years in a German prison camp, and Walt was the guy picking my targets.’<sup>45</sup> In Katzenbach’s view, Rostow’s advocacy of heavy bombing was founded on his view from behind a desk, rather from any real exposure to its essential implications, either in the air or on the ground.

**[Insert Figure 1 here]**

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<sup>41</sup> See especially Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 176-81.

<sup>42</sup> Walt W. Rostow, ‘The London Operation,’ 55-56.

<sup>43</sup> Feaver and Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> Feaver and Gelpi, ‘Speak Softly,’ 791.

<sup>45</sup> Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 200.

**Figure 1: Manner-of-Performance Rating, 4 October 1945, Walt Rostow OSS files, Folder: ROSTOW, Walter W., Box 662, RG226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Personnel Files, 1941-45.**

Rostow's performance assessments during the war might have entertained Katzenbach (see Figure 1) as they speak to their different experiences with aerial warfare. The reporting officer gave Rostow commendable marks on his intellectual abilities, which included such criteria as 'intelligence' and 'judgement and common sense,' but could not comment on other criteria such as 'physical activity and endurance,' 'stability under pressure,' and 'leadership.'<sup>46</sup> Although Rostow and Katzenbach can both be described as veterans of air operations during the Second World War, not all experience is equal. Those with greater exposure to the war's violence and danger had vastly different formative experiences than those involved only in its planning and administration. If Kennedy's generation had been 'tempered by war,' then Rostow's example shows that the men who shaped United States foreign policy had been tempered to greater or lesser degrees based on the nature of their participation in war.

### **Roger Hilsman**

One of Rostow's most frequent and ardent critics was Roger Hilsman. First as Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) and then as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Hilsman consistently resisted the introduction of conventional ground troops and the use of offensive air power in Vietnam until he was eventually removed by the Johnson administration. He described himself as a 'dove,' though Preston identified him as a 'soft hawk' on account of his support for the overthrow of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963.<sup>47</sup> His experiences with unconventional forces in Burma in the Second World War convinced Hilsman that Vietnam was an ideal spot to apply counterinsurgency strategies again. In his memoirs, he recounted that 'I had been bombed and strafed [...] too

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<sup>46</sup> Roger Hilsman OSS files, Folder: HILSMAN, Roger Capt ARMY Infantry, Box 335, RG226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Personnel Files, 1941-45.

<sup>47</sup> Roger Hilsman, 'Vietnam: The Decisions to Intervene' in Jonathan R. Adelman (ed.) *Superpowers and Revolution* (New York: Prager, 1986); Gerald J. Protheroe, 'Limiting America's Engagement: Roger Hilsman's Vietnam War,' *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 19, no. 2 (2008), 263-88; Preston, *Soft Hawks*.

many times to believe that air power alone could win either wars or battles.<sup>48</sup> Much like Rostow, however, he regularly drew on his experiences during the war to position himself as an expert on the problems in Vietnam and to advocate for what he saw as the intelligent application of US power.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

**Figure 2: Bronze Star Medal commendation, 5 September 1945, Roger Hilsman OSS files, Folder: HILSMAN, Roger Capt ARMY Infantry, Box 335, RG226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Personnel Files, 1941-45.**

Unlike many of his colleagues in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Hilsman was not an enlisted member of the armed forces, but instead grew up as an ‘Army Brat,’ and enrolled at West Point before the United States had even joined the war.<sup>49</sup> In his memoirs, he wrote about his 1943 graduating class, which had its graduation day pushed forward to meet wartime personnel requirements and ‘suffered more casualties than any other class at the academy, before or since.’<sup>50</sup> During the war, in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre, Hilsman also saw more direct combat than many of his future colleagues. He received several medals, including a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star (see Figure 2). His first mission was to command a unit of Merrill’s Marauders. The Marauders were deployed behind enemy lines in Burma for intelligence-gathering purposes and were infamous for their heroism, in addition to their appalling casualty rates.<sup>51</sup> Hilsman was wounded in combat but requested to be redeployed. He was assigned to OSS Detachment 101 in Burma, first as a liaison officer to the British Fourteenth Army and then as a commander of a multi-ethnic guerrilla unit deep behind enemy lines that provided intelligence to the main Allied forces and undertook sabotage activities. His final mission was a POW rescue in Manchuria where he freed his own father from a Japanese camp.<sup>52</sup>

The differences between Hilsman and Dean Rusk, his boss at the State Department, were significant. Hilsman disliked the Secretary of State with almost the same intensity as he

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<sup>48</sup> Roger Hilsman, *American Guerrilla: My War behind Japanese Lines* (New York: Brassey’s, 1990), 85-86.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>51</sup> Some 90% of his company were either killed or wounded. *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>52</sup> Roger Hilsman OSS files, Folder: HILSMAN, Roger Capt ARMY Infantry, Box 335, RG226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Personnel Files, 1941-45.

had when a young Rusk was assigned to General Joseph Stilwell's office in the CBI theatre. During policy discussion about Vietnam, Rusk earnestly supported a stronger commitment to South Vietnam, whereas Hilsman displayed that 'laconic tone' that Schlesinger ascribed to the New Frontiersmen. In Burma, Hilsman recalled the 'venomous hatred' of the Marauders towards Stilwell, who 'never paid a visit to their training camp,' and he blamed the General for 'order[ing his unit] into impossible situations without the supplies or reinforcements that were needed.'<sup>53</sup> Rusk later remembered that the 'troops in the field [...] don't care much for the staff. They're the guys back in the rear who are safe, relatively comfortable, not being shot at regularly.'<sup>54</sup> While both Rusk and Hilsman were, strictly speaking, veterans of the CBI theatre, Hilsman's memoirs offer an intimate view into the reality of combat, whereas Rusk's memoirs and oral histories mostly reflected on the colonial gentlemen's clubs that he frequented in Delhi.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to his disdain for Rusk and the other civilians he viewed as naive, Hilsman's service in the Second World War convinced him of the special applicability of his experience in guerrilla warfare to Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> Merrill's Marauders and OSS Detachment 101 were precursors for the US Army Rangers and the Special Forces respectively.<sup>57</sup> These types of unconventional units were on the fringes of the US military in the Second World War and thereafter. They were, however, at the forefront of the Kennedy administration's attempts to fight 'wars of national liberation' in the developing world, and Hilsman was one of the key in-house intellectuals in that effort.<sup>58</sup>

These forces were also a core component of Hilsman's 'Strategic Concept for South Vietnam,' a politico-military plan for Vietnam which he drafted in January 1962 in an attempt to halt the momentum towards the militarization of the US commitment in Vietnam. He returned to his Strategic Concept over and over again in the years that followed. In the document, he suggested that Vietnam was a 'political not a military problem' that required efforts at the village-level. He argued that the only type of US military assistance that could be of use would be smaller units such as Ranger companies and air power that was used, not

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<sup>53</sup> Hilsman, *American Guerrilla*, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Dean Rusk Oral History interview X by Richard Rusk and Thomas Schoenbaum (circa 1985), 7, accessed 25 August 2019, <http://russelldoc.galib.uga.edu/russell/view?docId=ead/RBRL214DROH-ead.xml.Rusk>.

<sup>55</sup> Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (London: Tauris, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Hilsman, *American Guerrilla*, Epilogue.

<sup>57</sup> Troy J. Sacquety, *The OSS in Burma: Jungle War against the Japanese* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 223-24.

<sup>58</sup> Basha i Novosejt, *I Made Mistakes*, Chapter 4.

for offensive purposes, but instead to assist these smaller units with air mobility. He chastized the military planners for ‘tactics more appropriate to conventional, World War II situations than guerrilla warfare’ and pointed specifically to his own experience in Burma as a more effective use of military power.<sup>59</sup>

With other colleagues that had emerged from OSS operational teams, Hilsman also emphasized the importance of ‘combining intelligence with unconventional warfare’ in the same organization.<sup>60</sup> Chief among his allies here was William Colby, who, like Hilsman, had served in the OSS and stayed on after the war as the organization morphed into the newly formed CIA. During the early years of the Vietnam War, Colby was Station Chief in Saigon, eventually rising through the ranks to become the Agency’s director in the 1970s. During the Kennedy administration, both Hilsman and Colby suggested, and for a time were able to secure, the assignment of Special Forces to the CIA to meet their vision of a more flexible and grassroots-level US involvement in South Vietnam.

Overall, Hilsman confirms the view that veterans are less likely to advocate for military solutions to international problems. More than most, he also fits Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson’s comment that ‘the man in civilian clothes [...] does not face the specter of death in his mind as he deliberates on actions that might be taken.’<sup>61</sup> Johnson’s statement speaks to the impact that close proximity to combat had on foreign policy officials making decisions about Vietnam. Hilsman blamed civilians, not the military, for the militarization of the commitment in Vietnam. He explained how senior military officials, particularly in the Army, earned the nickname of the ‘Never Again Club’ because of their prescient opposition to another land war in Asia and that the 1965 decisions to deploy combat forces in Vietnam were ultimately civilian decisions.<sup>62</sup>

However, the trajectory of Hilsman’s views does not fit with the notion that once a decision is made to go to war, veterans are more likely to be hawkish and to align their views

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<sup>59</sup> ‘A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam,’ Roger Hilsman to General Taylor, January 1962, Folder: Vietnam, General, Reports and Memos 1/62-2/62, Box 195a, National Security Files, JFKL.

<sup>60</sup> William Colby, ‘The Legacy of the OSS, 1945-91,’ in George C. Chalou (ed.), *The Secrets War: The Office of Strategic Services in World War II* (Washington DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), 354-59. These views were also echoed in Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs* (New York: Doubleday, 1964).

<sup>61</sup> McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*, 300.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Hilsman, *The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 54.



with those of the military. He consistently opposed military solutions to Vietnam, even after he had left government for academia.<sup>63</sup> As a veteran who had experienced guerrilla warfare firsthand in Asia, he felt well positioned to question both civilian and military officials' recommendations, which he did repeatedly. As a result, he 'made more enemies than anyone else in the upper levels of government,' including in the military, and was pushed out.<sup>64</sup> The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maxwell Taylor, himself an Army General, quipped that 'it just shows what happens when you put a West Pointer in the State Department.'<sup>65</sup> Despite his West Point training, Hilsman's recommendations suggest that he mostly represented an OSS point of view, that his experience during the war socialized him into thinking of Special Forces-type troops as the ideal fit for the problems in Vietnam. Just as Rostow displayed an organizational buy-in to the Air Force, Hilsman was convinced that *his* types of forces were the most powerful tool in the United States' arsenal.

### **John T. McNaughton**

If 'Air Marshall Rostow' and Hilsman were on different ends of the hawk/dove spectrum, John McNaughton sat between the two. McNaughton is most appreciated in the literature as Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's principal civilian aide during the Vietnam War, but his background before his appointment as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs has received far less attention.<sup>66</sup> His experiences, however, help to shed light on the contradiction of the apparently hawkish McNaughton who appears in the *Pentagon Papers* and the more reluctant, skeptical advisor presented in his diaries and colleagues' recounting of his private opinions.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Aurélie Basha i Novosejt, 'Breaking Ranks: Robert McNamara, Adam Yarmolinsky, and the Montreal Speech,' *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 3 (June 2019), 501.

<sup>64</sup> Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 374.

<sup>65</sup> Maxwell Taylor Oral History Interview No. 1 by Elspeth Rostow, Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Collection, 22 October 1969, JFKL.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed analysis of the relationship between McNaughton and McNamara and its effects on the strategic thinking of the former, see Lawrence Freedman, 'Vietnam and the Disillusioned Strategist,' *International Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1996), 133-51; Ross A. Kennedy, 'Dissent and Decision-Making: A Study of George Ball's and John McNaughton's Opposition to the Vietnam War', in *Fletcher Forum* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 64-109; Benjamin T. Harrison and Christopher L. Mosher, 'John T. McNaughton and Vietnam: The Early Years as Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1964-1965,' *History* 92, no. 308 (October 2007,): 496-514.

<sup>67</sup> Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

His wartime experience differed from that of Rostow and Hilsman: he served in the Naval Reserve as Officer-in-Charge of a 25-man armed guard crew aboard a US merchant ship (see Figure 3). While Rostow was poring over maps in search of bombing targets and Hilsman was fighting a guerrilla war in the Burmese jungle, Ensign (later Lieutenant) McNaughton spent much of the war fighting off seasickness, the misbehavior of his crew, and boredom. Where he did encounter danger, it was from indeterminable submarine attacks, which resulted in confusion and disarray.

**[Insert Figure 3 here.]**

**Figure 3: Lieutenant John T. McNaughton, undated (circa 1943), McNaughton family photo albums.**

McNaughton's choice to enlist in the US Naval Reserve after he graduated in 1942 is somewhat surprising, considering he was a poor seafarer and experienced bouts of seasickness during his teenage travels around Europe on the eve of war.<sup>68</sup> During the war, his armed guard crew took part in various convoys, including the transatlantic convoy HX-228 in the spring of 1943 destined for Loch Ewe in Scotland, via Belfast. After completing his training, McNaughton 'shoved off' from New Orleans in December 1942, but his excitement soon turned into a familiar battle with seasickness, the symptoms of which he endeavored to hide from his crew.<sup>69</sup> Boredom and uncertainty defined his experiences of the war. McNaughton spent much of his time in the military confined to the small world of his ship, struggling against weather conditions and unruly seamen, with little idea where he would be heading or when. He lamented spending Christmas on board his ship, where he could 'hardly tell one day from another'; 'every day is a completely new one with no heritage whatsoever.'<sup>70</sup> His diary details the administrative tasks he undertook: censoring his crew's letters, organizing drill and gun tests, maintaining ammunition supplies, assigning duties, and prescribing punishments.

Beyond daily struggles, McNaughton and his crew experienced more visceral dangers too, reflecting the maxim that war consists of 'months of boredom punctuated by moments of

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<sup>68</sup> A young McNaughton saw the funny side of his weak sea legs, as he entered a fancy-dress competition at a ball in February 1938 and won first place for his 'seasickness' costume: McNaughton diary, 13 February 1938.

<sup>69</sup> McNaughton diary, 23 December 1942; McNaughton diary, 27 December 1942.

<sup>70</sup> McNaughton diary, 30 December 1942.

extreme terror.’ His ship ran aground in December 1942 in the Florida Keys, alongside four others, two of which were unable to be freed.<sup>71</sup> The real danger, however, was the unpredictable threat of attack from enemy submarines. His voyage was interspersed with instances of ‘submarine scares’ and sightings that forced his convoy to revise course, as well as real dangers when multiple ships in his convoy were torpedoed.

The most destructive encounter came on 11 March 1943, when submarines attacked the convoy. After an order to abandon ship from the captain, McNaughton ordered his crew to stand by while he inspected the ship for damage. As he reviewed the hull with his coxswain, a tanker in the convoy 5,000 yards to McNaughton’s starboard bow was hit, and ‘the flames and explosion lit up the sky like daylight.’<sup>72</sup> McNaughton and his crew were thrown into disarray: seven of his men went missing while his ship searched for survivors from the tanker. In the aftermath, McNaughton was unsure what had caused the alarm aboard his own ship: ‘we either rammed a sub, felt depth charges, or felt a torpedo explosion... but we were not torpedoed.’<sup>73</sup> After the attack, the ship’s captain was considered too nervous to continue and was replaced when they docked in Belfast the following week. McNaughton, by comparison, received a citation for his cool headedness and his crew’s contribution to the safe arrival of their ship in port.

This experience undoubtedly fed into his reaction – as the most senior member of the Defense Department responsible for Vietnam – to the Tonkin Gulf attacks in 1964, which would provide the trigger for the beginning of the bombing campaign over North Vietnam. The bombing of the *USS Maddox* and *C. Turner Joy* in the Gulf of Tonkin delivered a pretext for ‘defensive action’ against North Vietnam, although historians now accept that the attacks themselves were in retaliation to US actions along the shore lines and in fact, the second attack never occurred. The events in Tonkin mirrored McNaughton’s experience with uncertainty in naval encounters and may explain why he was out of step with more senior colleagues when he insisted on gathering intelligence about what *exactly* had happened before deciding on a response even if he was ultimately overtaken by events and political considerations.<sup>74</sup> In particular, as news of a second attack on the *USS Maddox and C. Turner*

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<sup>71</sup> McNaughton diary, 27 December 1942.

<sup>72</sup> McNaughton diary, 10 March 1943.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, Transcripts of Telephone conversations (4, 5 August 1964) as part of National Security Agency 2005 declassification, accessed 26 November 2019, [https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/gulf-of-tonkin/memoranda/release-2/rel2\\_transcript.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/gulf-of-tonkin/memoranda/release-2/rel2_transcript.pdf).

Joy came into Washington on 4 August 1964, McNaughton ordered his deputies to press local commanders for clearer intelligence as the prospect of ‘freak weather effects on radar and overeager sonar men’ cast doubt over initial reports.<sup>75</sup>

More than his experience in the Navy, McNaughton’s experience *after* the war had the clearest influence on his thinking throughout the Vietnam War. Under the mentorship of W. Averell Harriman, he worked on the European Payments Union in Paris where he forged a close friendship with the economist Thomas Schelling. After a failed attempt to win Illinois’ 118<sup>th</sup> congressional seat in 1952, he joined Harvard Law School as an associate professor and lived next door to McGeorge Bundy in Cambridge. In 1964, McNaughton entered the Pentagon, first as General Counsel and then as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and became Defense Secretary Robert McNamara’s closest aide on Vietnam. He displayed the kind of loyalty that McNamara expected of his staff, and did his best to pursue the Defense Secretary’s Vietnam agenda, even if it grew more hawkish than his own policy persuasions.<sup>76</sup> Townsend Hoopes, then Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near South-East Asian Affairs and McNaughton’s friend, found McNaughton ‘serious, able, engaging, possessed of a mordant wit, and more than slightly mesmerized by the McNamara mystique.’<sup>77</sup>

Throughout his tenure at ISA, McNaughton distinguished himself through his loyalty to his boss; his clear, rationalist and legalistic approach to problems; and his disciplinarian approach to staff. While some of these character traits are represented in his wartime diary and were rewarded in the Navy, they were more of a function of his personality than any socialization in the military. McNaughton felt no great affinity with the military, and identified more as an academic than as a veteran.<sup>78</sup> Like many civilians in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, McNaughton was especially chastened after the Cuban Missile Crisis, his key formative experience, when he concluded that recommendations from military officers had been dangerously antagonistic.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 29; Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2003), 112-14.

<sup>76</sup> Shapley described McNaughton’s work for McNamara as ‘uniformly obedient and limited.’ Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 302; Freedman, ‘Vietnam and the Disillusioned Strategist,’ 134, 138.

<sup>77</sup> Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention: How Vietnam policy was made – and reversed – during the Johnson administration* (New York: Norton, 1987), 35.

<sup>78</sup> Perhaps this is because McNaughton served on a merchant ship and civilians, rather than Navy personnel, surrounded him.

<sup>79</sup> Freedman, ‘Vietnam and the Disillusioned Strategist,’ 137; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*.

When confronted with the problems in Vietnam, McNaughton turned to the ideas of his friend Schelling, not the military. As a pioneering game theorist, Schelling informed the Office of the Secretary of Defense's early advocacy of 'coercive diplomacy' and of the use of bombing over North Vietnam as 'signaling.' McNaughton was originally optimistic about the prospects of the bombing campaigns against the North and the novel application of military force, but as the war drew on and the desired effects proved not to be forthcoming, he became more skeptical and eventually joined the ranks of the administration's dissenters.

Ultimately, McNaughton's career challenges the idea that previous military service will align civilians more closely with military policy preferences on the use of force. If anything, at ISA, McNaughton played a significant part in holding back or diluting military advice as expressed through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He never adopted the US Navy mindset in the same way that Rostow was socialized in the bombing program. His proximity to combat was largely limited to the single encounter of March 1943, although his experience with the chaos and confusion of naval encounters made him wary of intelligence coming from Vietnam in the aftermath of the Tonkin Gulf attacks in particular, events that closely matched his own experiences. His wartime service, however, did not give McNaughton Hilsman's temperance when faced with decisions to use military force as his mathematical, more academic approach convinced him that a 'signaling' or 'graduated' bombing campaign might hold promise in Vietnam. In this respect, McNaughton was closer to Rostow in considering the use of force in a more detached fashion.

## **Conclusion**

That a cultural gap existed between senior civilian and military leaders during the early decisions on Vietnam is clear. Recalling his assignment to the Eighth Army Air Force, McNamara described Curtis LeMay as 'the finest combat commander of any service I came across in the war.'<sup>80</sup> With LeMay as Air Force Chief of Staff and McNamara as Secretary of Defense, however, McNamara and most of his civilian colleagues saw LeMay's hawkishness as dangerous. In many respects, LeMay stereotypically represented the view that once in war, military officials are more likely to be hawkish about the use of force. In one interview, for instance, he explained his preference for a much more forceful air campaign over the North Vietnam, saying: 'In spite of the arguments we've had in the Joint Chiefs, everyone was of the opinion that once you choose military action as a solution to your problem, then you

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<sup>80</sup> *Fog of War* transcript.

ought to get in with both feet and get the chore over with, and do the things that are necessary to be done.’<sup>81</sup>

LeMay, then, is a yard stick against which we might measure the cultural differences between veterans that transitioned to civilian roles, and assess how distinct their Vietnam preferences became from contemporary military personnel. Many of the Vietnam civilian decision-makers were veterans of the bombing campaign during the Second World War. While Rostow’s views tracked closely to LeMay and other senior military advisors, the same was not true for his colleagues.

Ultimately, our examples suggest a number of intuitive points, including the unsurprising conclusion that formative experiences during the Second World War did have an impact on civilian decision-makers’ views on Vietnam. However, different experiences of war led to different ideas about whether and how military power should be deployed. The impacts of serving in the US military were sufficiently individualized to challenge the idea that civilians can be clearly demarcated from veterans. Rather than whether or not these men once wore a military uniform, we suggest that it was their proximity to combat, and the degree to which they were socialized in the specific branch of their military service, that shaped their prescriptions for the use of force in Vietnam.

Rostow and Hilsman’s examples mirror each other and speak to this process of organizational buy-in: they not only served in a specific armed service, they also participated in its underlying bureaucratic project whereas McNaughton served in adjunct roles, in which he was never acculturated into the Navy *modus operandi*. Both Hilsman and Rostow showed clear intellectual lineages between their experiences in the Second World War and their recommendations for Vietnam, and contributed to the interservice rivalries that were a key feature of the Vietnam War. Most of the veterans in decision-making roles referred to their experience in the war as a source of legitimacy or to demonstrate knowledge of war, but Rostow and Hilsman saw their experiences in the Second World War as directly transferrable to the problems in Vietnam. Hilsman was critical of the Air Force’s bureaucratic agenda in pushing for the use of offensive air power in Vietnam and he encouraged the use of Special Forces at a time when they were on the ascendant and trying to prove their relevance.

The research has implications for historical scholarship in inviting others to more systematically consider how and why veterans in civilian national security roles might have adopted certain views with respect to the use of force. It remains the case that US troop

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<sup>81</sup> Williams, *LeMay on Vietnam*, 50-51.

deployments are heavy with logistical and other support roles, the type of role that Rostow for instance filled. The proportion of troops in a combat role, the so-called ‘tooth-to-tail ratio’, has steadily declined in US military deployments since the Second World War.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, our case studies suggest that a degree of socialization is important for the tendency in veterans’ views to track with senior military officials and that socialization happens within a specific branch of the armed services, rather than the military as a whole. During the Second World War, basic training was often limited to a few weeks and, as a result, indoctrination may have been less effective than with officers who attended military academies, such as Hilsman. As a result, it would be interesting for historians to see whether and how the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force after Vietnam, with longer training times and free choice to enlist, has accentuated this process of socialization.

Historians can usefully draw on relevant political science literature, which has a predictive value and provides helpful labels that we can use in your own analyses. In turn, our contribution can be to provide nuance, details that challenge neat dichotomies and conceptual frameworks. Since Preston’s article, which marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, historians of the Vietnam War have co-opted his language of ‘soft hawks’ and accept that categorizing civilian decision-makers in sharply delineated hawk/dove categories oversimplifies the messiness of policy-making during the war. Likewise, zeroing in on how the presence of veterans might influence their policy prescriptions is helpful but ultimately challenges binary thinking that would separate veterans from civilians.

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<sup>82</sup> John J. McGrath, *The Other End of the Spear: The Tooth-to-Tail Ration in Modern Military Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), 18-20, 27-30, 81-82, accessed 26 November 2019, [https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/mcgrath\\_op23.pdf](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/mcgrath_op23.pdf).