

The Vietnam War Reexamined

Going beyond the dominant orthodox narrative to incorporate insight from revisionist scholarship on the Vietnam War, Michael G. Kort presents the case that the United States should have been able to win the war, and at a much lower cost than it suffered in defeat. Presenting a study that is both historiographic and a narrative history, Kort analyzes important factors such as the strong nationalist credentials and leadership qualities of South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem, the flawed military strategy of "graduated response" developed by Robert McNamara, and the real reasons South Vietnam collapsed in the face of a massive North Vietnamese invasion in 1975. Kort shows how the US commitment to defend South Vietnam was not a strategic error but a policy consistent with US security interests during the Cold War, and that there were potentially viable strategic approaches to the war that might have saved South Vietnam.

Michael G. Kort is Professor in the Division of Social Sciences at Boston University. He is the author of several books, including *The Soviet Colossus: History and Aftermath*, *The Columbia Guide to the Cold War*, and *A Brief History of Russia*.

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*In memory of my parents
And for Maya*

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A Note on Vietnamese Names, Military Ranks, and the Spelling of the Words “Communist” and “Communism”

Vietnamese names begin with the family name. That name usually is followed by a middle name and then the given name. The middle name can indicate the generation to which a person belongs, which is one, but not the only, reason siblings often share that name. For example, the brothers Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu (and their two other brothers) had the same middle name. Complicating matters further, Vietnamese refer to each other formally by the given name. That is why, for example, following accepted practice, in this volume Ngo Dinh Diem is referred to as “Diem”; Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese general, is referred to as “Giap”; and Nguyen Van Thieu, the president of South Vietnam, is referred to as “Thieu.” The one exception to this system, admittedly a major one, is Ho Chi Minh, who, again following accepted practice, is referred to as “Ho.” As in most recently published books, Vietnamese individuals are indexed in this volume according to their family names. Thus in the index Ngo Dinh Diem is followed by Ngo Dinh Nhu under the letter “N,” General Giap is listed under the letter “V” as Vo Nguyen Giap, and, not an exception in this case, Ho is listed under “H” as Ho Chi Minh. Some important individuals are listed both ways: for example, Ngo Dinh Diem is found under his full name and under “Diem.” Readers of this volume also will notice a large number of people named Nguyen. This is not because they were related but rather because Nguyen is the most common family name in Vietnam; in fact, almost 40 percent of the people in Vietnam carry the family name Nguyen. It was Ho Chi Minh’s real family name (Nguyen Sinh Cung) as well as the family name of the alias (Nguyen Ai Quoc) he used for many years before becoming “Ho Chi Minh.”

Many of the books and articles that served as sources for this volume were written by serving or retired officers in the US military. In referring to them in the text for the first time, I have used the highest rank they reached of which I am aware. For example, Dave Richard Palmer, a colonel when he wrote *Summons of the Trumpet*, later became a general and is referred to as “General Dave Richard Palmer” in this volume, and James H. Willbanks, who published his major works after retiring from the US Army as a lieutenant colonel, is referred to by that rank when first mentioned in the text.

With regard to the spelling of the words “communism” and “communist,” my system is to spell them with a lowercase “c” when referring to that concept in the generic sense and with an uppercase “C” when referring to the Soviet variant and its various offshoots.

Abbreviations

APC	Accelerated Pacification Campaign
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMAC	Chinese Military Advisory Group
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later changed to Rural) Development Support
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DAO	Defense Attaché Office
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DVN	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
GVN	Government of (South) Vietnam
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
JCS	U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLF	National Liberation Front
POL	Petroleum, Oil, Lubricants
PPBS	Planning Programming and Budgeting Systems
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSDF	People's Self Defense Force
ROEs	Rules of Engagement
RVN	Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) Armed Forces

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SAM	Surface to Air Missile
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
VCI	Vietcong Infrastructure
VNQDD	Vietnam Nationalist Party
VWP	Vietnamese Workers' Party