

Contemporary Conflicts *in light of the Cold War*

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eWorkshop on **Crisis Diplomacy**

Background Briefing by [Prof. Fredrik Logevall, Cornell University](#):

Our subject in this session is crisis diplomacy, with particular emphasis on U.S. policy on Vietnam in the mid-1960s. By then, the United States had been involved in the Indochina conflict for almost two decades, first in assisting the French war effort against the Ho Chi Minh-led Vietminh, then (after the French defeat in 1954) in working to create and sustain an independent non-Communist government in the southern part of Vietnam. By 1963-64, however, a Hanoi-backed insurgency in South Vietnam threatened the survival of the South Vietnamese regime, and the Johnson administration opted to "Americanize" the conflict, which involved launching a sustained, graduated air campaign against enemy-held areas of South Vietnam as well as targets in the North, and dispatching U.S. ground forces to the South. By the end of 1965, some 180,000 American troops were on the ground in Vietnam.

Among the questions we shall consider are: (1) Why did successive U.S. administrations attach importance to the outcome in Vietnam? (2) Why did LBJ opt to make Vietnam a large-scale American war, despite deep misgivings; (3) How did the administration justify its action? (4) Why did the many opponents of the Americanization choose not to work hard to prevent the escalation? (5) What "lessons" did American officials and other observers take away from the long and difficult Vietnam intervention? (6) To what extent is the Vietnam War analogous to the present war in Iraq?

Suggested Readings:

Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999): 375-413; 496-498.

"Humphrey Advises Against Escalation, February 1965," Document 18, in Fredrik Logevall, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (New York: Longman, 2001): 124-128.

"5. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, 1964," "6. President Lyndon B. Johnson Explains Why Americans Fight in Vietnam, 1965," "7. Johnson Questions Dissenting Under Secretary of State George Ball, 1965," "8. Senator J. William Fulbright Decries the 'Arrogance of Power,' 1966," "9. Former Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford Recalls His Post-Tet Questions (1968), 1969," and "10. Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Concludes That He Erred, 1995," in Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Vol. 2* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001): 449- 459.

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