

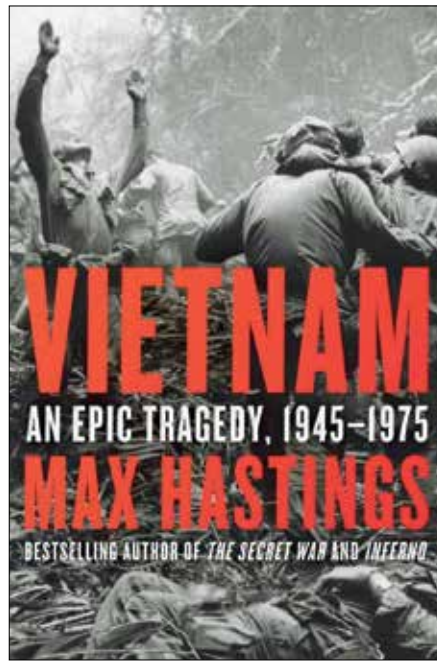
The discussion on political implications is thought to be self-explanatory: there is a fairly firm domestic political base in the United States for using drones to strike suspected terrorists abroad. While aggregate data generally show the majority of Americans support the use of drone strikes against suspected terrorists, the authors' presentation of opinion data for specific segments of the population presents a more nuanced picture. The poll data presented in the case study show that support in the United States is not as robust as advocates claim. The inclusion of case studies in each chapter that offer deeper dives into aspects of the debate surrounding drones is one of the book's fundamental strengths. The chapters themselves cover all of the key points, and the case studies allow the chapters to engage with the most important issues in greater depth.

The final chapter is the most interesting. Addressing the emerging issue of drone proliferation, the authors walk through the differing thoughts on the effects that diffusion of drone technology will have. They examine the unconfirmed use of a drone by Hizballah on September 21, 2014, to target al-Nusra Front fighters in Syria. This raises the question as to what happens when states lose the monopoly of this technology.

By highlighting the key arguments on both sides of the debate about drones, the authors present each side as equally as possible. The book touches on the right issues; however, those who are looking for fresh arguments regarding drones should look elsewhere. The authors' balance and breadth make this book ideal for classroom use. While the book does not offer anything original to the growing literature on drone use, it does serve as an effective teaching tool for those seeking to learn about the issues surrounding drone use outside conventional battlefields. JFQ

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Matthew Mueller wrote this review as a graduate student in the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He now works at the Institute for the Study of War.



### **Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945–1975**

By Max Hastings  
Harper Collins, 2018  
\$37.50 896 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0062405661

Reviewed by Williamson Murray

Max Hastings has had a spectacular career as a historian, journalist, and newspaper editor. He has now turned his attention to writing a history of the Vietnam War, from its inception with French colonial rule to the final denouement in spring 1975. The word *tragic* is all too often overused, but in this case, Hastings is correct to term the tale that he covers a long and epic tragedy. As with so many of his other books, he discusses with penetrating insight the arrogance and abysmal political and military leadership of the war at the highest levels. But in the end, it was those soldiers and civilians at the lowest levels who suffered the most from the mistakes, faulty assumptions, and carelessness of their supposed betters.

What makes Hastings such an extraordinary historian is the fact that he brings his journalist sense to sniff out the stories

and performance of those who participated in discussions and decisionmaking at the highest levels. This quality also makes him a wonderful interviewer of the living, whether they are political leaders, military leaders, or common soldiers. It also provides him the ability to bring to life the dry political and military records of the past as well as the oral interviews that the American military conducted during and after the war. Moreover, Hastings, having covered political and military leaders over the past five decades, has a real sense of what drives them. For the most part, the leadership of the French, Americans, and Vietnamese—southern as well as northern—was worse than abysmal; they made a troubled and difficult situation much worse than it ought to have been.

On the French side, military leaders started the war with an unjustified contempt for the Vietnamese. The army they brought to Southeast Asia consisted of professional French soldiers, the hodgepodge of nationalities who make up the French Foreign Legion, and colonial troops drawn from Algeria, Morocco, and francophone Africa. None had the slightest interest in providing an alternative to the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh and his supposedly amateur general Vo Nguyen Giap, who appears as one of the few senior military leaders who possessed a realistic sense of the political and military equations in the war. The sorry French effort eventually collapsed at Dien Bien Phu in spring 1954, when French generals committed some of their best troops to a hopeless fight and then spent the months of March, April, and May quarreling among themselves and begging the Americans for aid as their troops died. On the other side, Giap provided generalship that was both sophisticated and ruthless.

As a result, the French abandoned their colonies in Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) in 1954, while the Americans thought they had saved at least a portion of Vietnam from communist evils with the Geneva Peace Accords. In fact, they had not saved anything—they only prolonged the agony for the Vietnamese and eventually a

sizeable number of Americans. But it was the Vietnamese who suffered the most in the aftermath of the war to drive the French out. Those in the north suffered under a merciless and fanatical communist dictatorship that aimed to impose the nirvana promised by Karl Marx on a desperately poor population, those in the south under an incompetent regime run by corrupt generals, and eventually Americans who understood virtually nothing about Vietnamese history, culture, and language. In effect, the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu had made the survival of South Vietnam, even under competent leadership, virtually impossible, and the South Vietnamese received anything but that.

From 1955 on, the Americans provided mountains of cash, weapons, and ammunition, but few of those dealing with South Vietnam possessed either any sense of the political and military difficulties involved in fighting an insurgency or the complexities of the human environment that was South Vietnam. Unfortunately for all concerned, the American performance was marked by extraordinary arrogance and contempt for those who knew something about the area. Among the worst were Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara, who enthusiastically lied to the American people, deployed military forces as a means of sending signals, and remained consistently ignorant of the nature of North Vietnamese leaders. Above all, neither they nor their generals developed a clear strategy or rationale for committing tens of thousands and then hundreds of thousands of young Americans to a war that made no strategic sense. McNamara clearly deserves his reputation as the Secretary of Defense who managed to do the most damage to the United States, which he was supposed to protect. For their part, President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger reached a level of cynicism that is truly astonishing, and their efforts to preserve American honor during their tenure in office failed completely at a cost of more than 15,000 Americans dead and untold numbers of Vietnamese casualties. All this Hastings records with a sharpness and clear

understanding of the ability of those in power to misuse their positions.

The performance of the American generals was dismal. Unimaginative and misunderstanding the nature of the war, General William Westmoreland, commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, developed a firepower-intensive war that smashed up the landscape, killed far more civilians than the Viet Cong, and paid little attention to the political framework within which the war was being fought. He was also the worst kind of “looking good general.” On the first night of the Tet Offensive, when the 716<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion, the only U.S. Army unit in Saigon’s center, refused to come to the aid of the Embassy under attack, Westmoreland remained ensconced in his quarters for 5 hours until just after American paratroopers had secured the Embassy.

Westmoreland then chewed out the paratrooper captain and his men, who had been fighting over the past several hours to kill the Viet Cong sappers, for their appearance and ordered them to smarten up. To another American, “the general expressed disgust at the unseemly mess. ‘I suggest you get this place cleaned up,’ he told the duty officer, ‘and get these people back to work by noon.’” As for the political repercussions of the attack on the Embassy, Westmoreland did not have a clue. But the most significant mistake the general was to make during the Tet Offensive and the American and South Vietnamese counteroffensive was to focus on Khe Sanh, while the Viet Cong were slaughtering the population in Hue and other cities. It was the vicious battle for Hue, the ancient capital of Vietnam, that probably did the most damage to American attitudes back home.

But as Hastings underlines throughout his account, the other side of the hill had as its leaders a group of truly ruthless, murderous ideologues. For those who have not followed the revelations that have been coming out over the past decade from Hanoi, Hastings’s account of the North Vietnamese leadership will be eye-opening. By the early 1960s, Ho Chi Minh and Giap had been largely removed

from political and military decisionmaking. The crucial political decisions were now in the hands of Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, two ferociously committed Stalinists, who would consistently get the war in the south wrong. But in the highly charged political atmosphere of North Vietnam, ideological commitment was everything and the reality of American strength was a mere bagatelle. Thus in 1964, during the Tonkin Gulf Crisis, Le Duan had contemptuously dismissed Giap’s worry about getting involved with the Americans with the comment that “He’s as timid as a rabbit.”

Not surprisingly, Le Duan was behind the Tet Offensive of January 1968 in spite of Giap’s warnings about American firepower and his belief that the Americans would withdraw in the near future. The former clearly believed that the result of such an offensive would lead to a popular revolt that would drive the Americans out and overthrow the “puppet” regime: “If you wanted victory, guerrilla struggle had to evolve into large-scale conventional war. Half a million people will take up arms for us.” Again, events proved him wrong. Tet, exceedingly badly planned so that attacks occurred with minimal reconnaissance, and in most areas badly executed by the attackers, whether North Vietnamese or Viet Cong, resulted in a disastrous military defeat, especially for the latter.

Nevertheless, the dismal military results had little impact on Le Duan’s control over the regime and its army. As one Viet Cong observer of his brethren in the north commented, “they had sacrificed conscience and pragmatism for the certitudes of their political religion. Amid their steely arrogance, there was no latitude for compromise.” Learning nothing from his past mistakes, Le Duan was the author of the spring 1972 Easter Offensive that again proved a military disaster. He remained in power, although Giap would return to run the 1975 offensive that finally crushed South Vietnam.

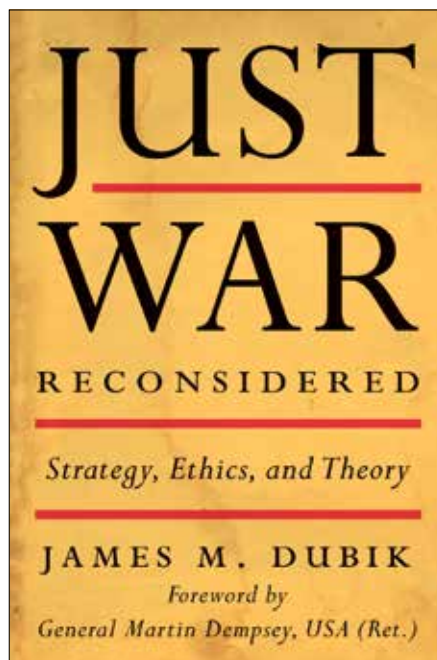
Caught between the implacable, ferocious North Vietnamese and Viet Cong communists on one side, and the Americans with their indiscriminate use

of firepower, the Vietnamese people, north and south, suffered unimaginable trials. What makes *Vietnam* such an impressive study is Hastings's ability to weave the stories of common soldiers and civilians on both sides of the struggle into a terrifying and impressive tale of both man's inhumanity to his fellows, and the heroism of those on the sharp end. He is able, thus, to connect the highest levels of decisionmaking in Hanoi, Washington, and Saigon, while at the same time providing the reader with a sense of the terrible consequences that often result from those who make the decisions with little understanding or concern for their impact on those below them.

From the American point of view, perhaps the saddest result of U.S. participation in this conflict was that U.S. political and military leaders and their people learned so little from the price they paid for our participation in the war. JFQ

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### Just War Reconsidered: Strategy, Ethics, and Theory

By James Dubik

University of Kentucky Press, 2016

\$25.00 236 pp.

ISBN: 978-0813175010

Reviewed by C. Anthony Pfaff

Lieutenant General James Dubik, USA (Ret.), in his *Just War Reconsidered*, provides a provocative account of perhaps Just War Theory's greatest blind spot: accountability of senior political and military leaders for the decisions they make regarding how to wage war. Traditionally, Just War theories divide decisions about war into two broad categories: *jus ad bellum*, which are the right reasons to go to war, and *jus in bello*, which governs right conduct in war. This account only holds the civilian leadership accountable for the decision to go to war, and the military leadership accountable for how they treat enemy combatants and noncombatants when fighting the war. It excludes from governance what either set of leaders does to its own troops or peoples.

Dubik argues that there must be principles that guide senior leaders'

conduct in the waging of war, which he defines as achieving coherence by setting war aims and aligning strategy and policy to achieve those aims; generating organizational capacity to achieve those aims at the least cost in terms of lives and resources; and maintaining legitimacy of the war effort by observing the war convention, sustaining public support, and ensuring proper subordination of the military-to-civilian leadership. As he states, "Poor war aims, strategies, and policies, badly thought-through campaigns and major operations, and inefficient and ineffective civil-military dialogue and execution" can prolong war unnecessarily, wasting precious national resources and, more importantly, lives, while placing the political community at risk. So by leaving war-waging out of *jus in bello*, Just War Theory omits an important way senior political and military leaders can fail to meet wartime responsibilities.

Setting conditions for fulfilling those responsibilities requires getting the civilian-military relationship right. Dubik argues that two dominant views, those of Samuel Huntington and Peter Feaver, fail in this regard. Huntington's approach, known as "objective control," divides responsibility much along the same lines as traditional Just War Theory: the civilian leadership is responsible for deciding when to go to war, while the military leadership is responsible for fighting it. The problem with this approach is that the demarcation line between purely political and purely military can be blurry. It is not in the interests of the political leadership to leave all the war-making decisions to the military, as Abraham Lincoln found out when he entrusted the war to George McClellan. Moreover, especially in the United States where the military is accountable both to the President and Congress, it is not always possible for the military to stay out of the political side of war.

Unfortunately, Feaver's "principal agent" approach, while an improvement, does not fare much better. This approach, which recognizes that political and military leaders can have experience relevant to both spheres, characterizes the civilian-military relationship as that of employer