

Identifications and Questions for Consideration for George Herring's America's Longest War

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Preface

Questions for consideration:

1. Why does the author believe that the United States became involved in Vietnam?
2. What does the author believe caused the U.S. failure in Vietnam?
3. Does the author believe that ideology alone shaped U.S. policy in Vietnam? If not, why not?
4. Why does the author characterize U.S. policy as misguided?
5. How does the author respond to those who argue that victory could have been obtained if only the war had been fought differently?
6. How does the author view Vietnam as significant for understanding for Americans the costs of the war, and possibly future ones?

Chapter 1: Dead End Alley: The United States, France, and the First Indochina War, 1950-1954

Identifications

Trung Sisters
Phan Boi Chau
Ho Chi Minh
Vo Nguyen Giap
August Revolution of 1945
O.S.S.
Vietminh
Truman Doctrine
Josef Stalin
Mao Zedong
Loss of China
NSC-68
Joseph McCarthy
Domino theory
Bao Dai
Battle of Cao Bang
General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny
Vietnamese National Army (VNA)
Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG)
European Defense Community (EDC)

Dean Acheson
Operation Lorraine
John Foster Dulles
General Henri Navarre
Dien Bien Phu
Operation Vulture
United Action
Pierre Mendès-France
Geneva Accords

Questions for consideration:

1. Why were the statements of Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap=s statements on September 2, 1945 both informative and ironic?
2. What was the Vietnamese legacy of resistance to foreigners?
3. What was Ho=s background and how did he emerge as a leader?
4. What role did World War II play in the Vietnamese move toward independence?
5. Why were the French and Vietminh unable to reach a satisfactory agreement after September 1945? What was the final result?
6. Preceding World War II, why were Americans interested in Indochina?
7. How did President Franklin Roosevelt view French colonialism in the region? How did his views change in the period immediately preceding his death?
8. What was the initial viewpoint of President Harry Truman and his administration regarding the Vietminh?
9. By 1947, how had the Truman administration come to view the struggle between the French and the Vietminh?
10. How did the Vietminh try to offset the perception that they were tools of the international Communist conspiracy?
11. How does the author critique the Truman administration=s perceptions of the Vietminh?
12. What was pro-French neutrality that dominated U.S. policy through 1950?
13. What were the chances that the United States could have reached a point of accommodation with the Vietminh in the period preceding 1950?
14. Why was 1950 important for changing a localized anticolonial struggle into a major and increasingly dangerous theater in the emerging Cold War? Why and how did the United States become more prominently involved in the conflict?
15. Why was China=s fall to Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party important to the events unfolding in Indochina?
16. How did the Cold War expand in Europe in the period, 1947-1950, and what effect did it have on the struggle in Indochina?
17. What caused the strategic reassessment in 1950 regarding previously marginal areas such as Southeast Asia? What role did Japan play in the process?
18. Why were American policymakers initially skeptical of the Bao Dai Solution?
19. Does the author believe that in 1950 that the revolutionaries were inspired and directed by Moscow? If not, why not?
20. Why does the author argue that in 1950 American assessments of the situation in Vietnam was off the mark?
21. Did the Bao Dai Solution provide much control to the Vietnamese? If so, how? If not, why not?
22. How did the fighting that began in Korea in the summer of 1950 affect U.S. views of the fighting in

Indochina?

23. In late 1950, the United States committed more aid, both military, economic, and technical. What did it hope to gain from the French? Were its efforts effective?
24. How did the French view U.S. assistance in the period, 1950-1952?
25. How did U.S. policy in the period, 1950-1952, continue to be a hostage to its policy in Europe?
26. What problems did Truman and Acheson's successors face in 1953 as opposed to 1950?
27. How did U.S. policy in Indochina change under the Eisenhower administration?
28. What did leaders such as Rob McClintock and General J. Lawton Collins see as the sources of the French problems in defeating the Vietminh? What did the Eisenhower administration propose as a solution to the problems?
29. Why did the government of Joseph Laniel pursue the Navarre Plan? What were its goals?
30. Why did the French choose to do battle at Dien Bien Phu?
31. Why did French talks regarding Vietnamese independence fail? Why then did the French agree to talks at Geneva in 1954 regarding the issue?
32. What were Dulles and Eisenhower's responses to the French peace overtures in early 1954?
33. Why were Dulles and Eisenhower unwilling to commit U.S. forces to relieve the French at Dien Bien Phu? What role did Congress play? Why was the United Action plan a failure?
34. What were the deep marks that Battle of Dien Bien Phu imposed on those involved?
35. Why did not the United States more actively participate in the Geneva Conference?
36. Once French defeat was apparent, what type of settlement did the United States pursue?
37. What role did the Chinese and Russians play in shaping the peace? Why was it important?
38. How did the various parties view the Geneva Accords?
39. What did U.S. policymakers blame France's failures on?

Chapter 2: Our Offspring: Nation Building in South Vietnam, 1954-1961

Identifications

Edward Lansdale
South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)
Ngo Dinh Diem
A Passage of Freedom
The Sects Crisis
Cao Dai
Hoa Hao
Binh Xuyen
General Lawton Collins
A Gentleman's agreement
A national referendum
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
American Friends of Vietnam (AFV)
Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG)
Civil Guard
Michigan State group
commercial import program
Ngo Dinh Nhu

Civic Action Program
National Liberation Front (NLF)
agroville program
Elbridge Durbrow
Pathet Lao

Questions for consideration:

1. What were the goals of the Eisenhower administration in Indochina after Geneva and why?
2. What actions were employed in what was characterized as the AGood Stout Effort?@
3. Why does the author argue that if the United States had looked all over the world that it Acould not have chosen a less promising place for an experiment in nation building?@
4. What were some of the types of warnings issued regarding the Apitfalls of nation building?@
5. With all the warnings and Dulles himself admitting that there was only a 1 in 10 chance of success would the administration choose to go forward?
6. How did Ngo Dinh Diem become the U.S. choice for the position of premier?
7. What role did the United States play in helping Diem survive the sect crisis?
8. Why and how did the United States and Diem avoid the national elections as called for in the Geneva Accords?
9. How did the international community respond to the U.S. and Diem=s failure to hold national elections?
10. What were the major U.S. efforts to build a national and internal security state in South Vietnam? What were the successes and failures in the process?
11. How did the United States try to build an economy in South Vietnam? What were the successes and failures?
12. By the late 1950s, Senator Gale McGee proposed that South Vietnam be made a Ashowcase@ for foreign aid programs? Was this a realistic appraisal according to the author?
13. Why would the author emphasize Athe massive infusion of American aid thus kept South Vietnam alive, but it fostered dependency rather than laying the foundation for a genuine independence?
14. Why does the author argue Athe basic problem of nation building was political?@
15. What was Diem=s political philosophy and how did it correspond to the American vision?
16. What was Diem=s Aonly significant reform@ and how was it accepted?
17. What were some of the efforts made by the U.S. government and private organizations to support Diem and propagandize his efforts?
18. What were the origins of the insurgency in the South? What was the initial attitude of Ho and the North Vietnamese regarding the Viet Cong and how did it change over time?
19. How did Diem=s response to the insurgency heighten Apopular antagonism toward the government?@
20. How did the United States perceive and respond to the growing insurgency?
21. How did the event in Europe and Laos distract American attentions in 1960?
22. Why does the author argue Athrough luck as much as anything else, the Eisenhower administration kept the Diem regime afloat for six years?@

Chapter 3: Limited Partnership: Kennedy and Diem, 1961-1963

Identifications

Thich Quang Duc

New Frontiersmen
Aflexible response@
the Hmong
Walt Rostow
Taylor-Rostow mission
W. Averell Harriman
Robert McNamara
strategic hamlet program
Project ABeef Up@
Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV)
General Paul D. Harkins
Army Republic of Vietnam
Battle of Ap Bac
Madame Nhu
John Kenneth Galbraith
Neil Sheehan
David Halberstam
Mike Mansfield
Hilsman-Forrestal Report
Buddhist Crisis
Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.
Krulak-Mendenhall Mission
DeGaulle Plan of 1962
Souvanna Phouma
Duong Van Minh
McNamara-Taylor Report
Lucien Conein

Questions for Consideration

1. How do John F. Kennedy=s statements on page 89 during his inaugural address reflect his state of mind in January 1961?
2. How does Kennedy criticize his predecessors and what changes did he want?
3. Why would the author argue that AVietnam stands as the most tragic legacy of the global activism of the Kennedy era?@
4. What did Kennedy and his advisors believe was the intent of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, especially following the summit meeting in Vienna in June 1961?
5. Why did Kennedy refuse to place U.S. troops in Laos and seek a negotiated settlement when he would not do the same in South Vietnam?
6. What were the various responses to the idea of a 8000 person Alogistic task force@ as proposed by Taylor and Rostow?
7. Why did Kennedy pursue a Amiddle-of-the-road@ approach following the Taylor-Rostow mission?
8. Why did the Kennedy administration have such a hard time forcing Diem to conform and make changes in 1961?
9. Why does the author argue AKennedy=s decisions in 1961 mark yet another critical turning point in American involvement in Vietnam?@
10. How did the Kennedy administration deceive the American public regarding the activities of U.S.

Advisers in 1962?

11. What were the challenges the ARVN faced even when backed by U.S. support? How did the Viet Cong respond?
12. Why did land reform efforts by the Diem government fail?
13. Why does the author note that throughout 1962, Vietnam remained an operational rather than policy problem?
14. By the end of 1962, more critics had developed of the administration's policies? Who were they and why did they begin to question Kennedy's policy?
15. By early 1963, how and why had more tensions developed between the Americans and the South Vietnamese?
16. Why did Kennedy begin to consider a troop reduction and possible withdrawal in mid-1962?
17. How does the author view the interpretations of Roger Hilsman, Kenneth O'Donnell, and John Newman regarding their assertions that Kennedy would have withdrawn U.S. troops had he lived?
18. What were the origins of the discontent and early responses of the Diem regime to the Buddhist Crisis?
19. How did U.S. officials respond to the Buddhist crisis?
20. What were and why were the instructions of August 24" important?
21. Why did DeGaulle's plan appear to have only limited potential for success in October 1962?
22. Why does the author assert the administration was not as innocent as some of its defenders maintained regarding the coup against Diem?
23. What is the author's final appraisal of Kennedy's legacy in Vietnam?

Chapter 4: Enough, but Not Too Much: Johnson's Decisions for War, 1963-1965

Identifications

National Security Council Actions Memorandum (NASM) 273

General Nguyen Khan

A Great Society

Dean Rusk

National Security Council Actions Memorandum (NASM) 288

General William Westmoreland

OPLAN 34A

USS Maddox and Turner Joy

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

Ernest Gruening

George Ball

Nguyen Cao Ky

Operation A Rolling Thunder

McGeorge Bundy

John McNaughton

A enclave strategy

General U Thant

A Target: College Campuses

A unconditional discussions

General Nguyen Van Thieu

General Earle Wheeler

Clark Clifford
Bui Diem

Questions for consideration

1. What was the response of the NLF to the overthrow of Diem?
2. What did President Johnson mean when he felt like a catfish that had just Agrabbed a big juicy worm with a right sharp hook in the middle of it?@
3. In the first three months of the President Johnson=s term, what were the conditions like in South Vietnam?
4. What type of personality did President Johnson have and how did it affect his policymaking decisions?
5. Despite the warnings and fears of the pitfalls, President Johnson decided to Astay the course.@ Why?
6. Starting in mid-March 1964, the Johnson administration began an escalation of hostilities and American involvement? How did it occur and what were its components as well as successes and failures?
7. What were the events that led to President Johnson seeking the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution?
8. Does the author believe that McNamara and Johnson purposely misled the Congress and the American people to secure the passage of the resolution?
9. Why does the author believe that Afrom a domestic political standpoint, Johnson=s handling of the Tonkin Gulf incident was masterly?@
10. How did the Tonkin Gulf incident affect the North Vietnamese?
11. According to the author, why did the Johnson administration choose war in late 1964?
12. Why was the approval of the air campaign in early December 1964 characterized as a Amomentous decision?@
13. Why does the author argue that Ait was abundantly clear . . . that Pleiku was the pretext rather than the cause of the February decision@ to begin the intensive bombing campaign?
14. What were Maxwell Taylor=s objections to Westmoreland=s troop requests in early 1965? Why does the author characterize them as Ain many way prophetic?@
15. Why does the author argue, AJohnson thus took the nation into war by indirection and dissimulation?@
16. How did the Johnson administration respond to the voices of dissent in early 1965?
17. Why did the early peace initiatives fail?
18. What were the Afateful decisions@ President Johnson made in July 1965 that set Athe United States on a course for which it would not deviate for nearly three years and opening the way for eight years of bloody warfare in Vietnam?@
19. Why did Johnson hesitate to seek a declaration of war in July 1965?
20. Why does the author argue that AJohnson=s middle course probably reflected the aspirations of the American public and Congress?@
21. According to the author, what were the Atwo fatal miscalculations@ on which the administration based its policies decisions in the first two years in office?

Chapter 5: On the Tiger=s Back: The United States at War, 1965-1967

Identifications

AYouth Shock Brigades@

strategy of attrition
 Asearch and destroy@
 Amany flags” campaign
 Agent Orange
 Free Fire Zones
dau tranh
 Ho Chi Minh Trail
 Operation ACedar Falls@
 Abody counts@
 Honolulu Communiqué
 Buddhist Crisis of 1966
 Revolutionary Development Program
 September 1967 Elections
 PX Alley
 AFourteen Points@
 Janusz Lewandowski
 Ahawks@
 Adoves@
 J. William Fulbright
 Howard Levy
 Stop the Draft Week
 San Antonio formula
 Operation Chaos
 Wise Men

Questions for Consideration

1. What was the mindset of the Americans as represented by the statements of the journalists on the *Ranger* and Philip Caputo? How does it help explain how the Americans chose to prosecute the war?
2. What were the contradictions of U.S. policy as the Johnson administration decided to enter full combat status in 1965?
3. Did the United States really have a history of true success in its use of strategic bombing? If not, why were American policymakers so reliant on it in Vietnam?
4. Why does the author conclude that Athe manner in which airpower was used in Vietnam virtually ensured that it would not achieve its objectives?@
5. How did the NLF and North Vietnamese benefit from Soviet and Chinese assistance? Were they puppets of the two major Communist superpowers?
6. What were the results of the Johnson administration=s Amany flags@ campaign?
7. How did the North Vietnamese respond to the U.S. escalation in 1965?
8. How does the author assess the effectiveness of U.S. ground operations in the period, 1965-67? What were the Aserious flaws@ of the war of attrition that the author notes?
9. What were the successes and failures of the pacification program?
10. What was the impact of the Americanization of the war on South Vietnam?
11. Why did tensions increase between the Americans and South Vietnamese after 1965? What was the opinion of many Americans of their South Vietnamese counterparts and vice versa?
12. Why does the author emphasize that Aprogress in the critical areas of national building was thus even more limited than on the battlefield?@

13. Why does the author emphasize that the steady expansion of the war spurred strong international and domestic pressures for negotiation, but the military stalemate produced an equally firm diplomatic impasse?
14. What undermined the Marigold initiative?
15. Why does the author argue that the war thus divided Americans as nothing since the debate on slavery?
16. Who composed the anti-war movement? Were they a homogenous group? If not, why not? What were their goals and methods?
17. What were the effects of the antiwar movement?
18. Why does the author assert that the public mood—tired, angry, and frustrated—posed perhaps a more serious threat to the administration than did the antiwar movement?
19. What were the increasingly sharp divisions within the government by 1967?
20. Why was the change in attitude by McNamara significant? How did Johnson respond to McNamara's proposals?
21. Why does the author believe that Johnson's decisions of 1967, even more than those of 1965, were improvisations that defied military logic and did not face, much less resolve, the contradictions in American strategy?
22. How did Johnson respond to the antiwar movement and also try to shore up public opinion in late 1967? Was it successful?
23. Why did the author argue that LBJ chose to stay the course in 1967? Do you agree?

Chapter 6: A Very Near Thing: The Tet Offensive and After, 1968

Identifications

Battle of Khe Sanh
 Wheeler Report
 Clifford Task Force
 Walter Cronkite
 Eugene McCarthy
 Robert Kennedy
 A Gold Crisis
 March 31 Speech
 Creighton Abrams
 Cheu Hoi Program
 Phoenix Program
 Vietnamization
 Operation Recovery
 William Daley
 October Bombing Halt
 Madame Anna Chennault
 A battle of the tables

Questions for consideration:

1. Do you agree with General Westmoreland's appraisal of the Tet Offensive?
2. Why did the NLF and North Vietnamese choose to launch the Tet Offensive?

3. How effective was the U.S./ARVN counteroffensive?
4. Why would the author assert that if Tet was a defeat for the enemy, it was still a costly victory for the United States and South Vietnam?
5. How did the Tet Offensive affect American public opinion and the Johnson administration?
6. Why did Westmoreland and Wheeler push for more troops?
7. Why did the Clifford Task Force reject Westmoreland's request? Instead what did Clifford recommend and why? What was Johnson's position on the recommendation?
8. According to the author, how did media attitudes and reporting change during Tet? What effect did it have?
9. How does the author respond to the charges of Westmoreland and others that the media seized defeat from the jaws of victory by turning the public against the war?
10. What effect did the Goldwater Crisis have on U.S. policy in Indochina?
11. According to the author, why was Johnson's speech on March 31 in some ways a major turning point in U.S. involvement in Vietnam?
12. What was the LBJ policy of fighting while negotiating? Was it realistic and successful?
13. What was the Accelerated Pacification program? Was it effective?
14. Why does the author argue that pacification and Vietnamization were both long-range undertakings . . . and the frenzied efforts of 1968 could not make up for years of neglect?
15. Why does the author assert that although it improved markedly in the aftermath of Tet, the performance of the government of South Vietnam remained at the best uneven, its stability uncertain?
16. In the aftermath of Tet, how did fractures in the American social fabric become more apparent?
17. How did Thieu affect the negotiations in the time immediately preceding the American presidential election in 1968?
18. Why does the author believe it seems doubtful that South Vietnamese intransigence sabotaged an opportunity for a peace settlement in 1968?
19. Do you agree with the author that Tet represented a major political victory for the enemy because it convinced most Americans that the war could not be won in an acceptable time and at an acceptable cost?

Chapter 7: A War for Peace: Nixon, Kissinger, and Vietnam, 1969-1973

Identifications

A peace with honor
 Henry Kissinger
 Operation MENU
 protracted war strategy
 Chicago Seven
 Operation DUCK HOOK
 Sir Robert Thompson
 A silent majority speech
 Fall Moratoriums
 Prince Sihanouk
 Lon Nol
 Central Office for South Vietnam

Kent State University and Jackson State University
Cooper-Church Amendment
McGovern-Hatfield Amendment
Hutson Plan
LAM SON 719
A Winter Soldier® hearings
William Calley
Pentagon Papers
Le Duc Tho
Easter Offensive
Committee for the Reelection of the President (CREEP)
Operation LINEBACKER
Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG)
A jugular diplomacy®
Christmas Bombings
Paris Agreements

Questions for consideration:

1. Why was Kissinger=s statement, A we will not make the same old mistakes. We will make our own® so enlightening?
2. What is the author=s assessment of the international nature of Nixon and Kissinger=s foreign policy?
3. What was Nixon=s goal regarding Vietnam and why did he insist on ending the war A honorably?®
4. Why does the author argue that A the Nixon-Kissinger strategy for ending the war was deeply flawed and based on a large dose of wishful thinking?®
5. What were the major components of Nixon=s public relations strategy designed to give the appearance of national unity? Were they successful?
6. How did Nixon respond to his domestic critics?
7. How was the Nixon policy of Vietnamization different from that of his predecessor?
8. Why does the author assert that A on the surface, at least, the insurgency appeared to be under control® after the Vietnamization program was implemented fully in 1969? Yet, he also notes the weaknesses. What were they?
9. Why does the author argue that A Kissinger=s later claim that the United States intervened in Cambodia hesitantly and belatedly and only after being persuaded that the North Vietnamese were committed to the destruction of Lon Nol=s government appear at best misleading?®
10. What were the results of the invasion of Cambodia? Militarily? On Cambodia? Domestically?
11. Why does the author argue, A although Nixon escaped with his power intact, the Cambodian venture tightened the trap he had set for himself?®
12. After the Cambodian invasion, the author characterizes the period as one of A deadlock and dissension.® Why?
13. What was the administration=s response to the groups and individuals such as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War? Mayday Tribe? Daniel Ellsberg?
14. Why does the note that after 1969, A the malaise that afflicted the nation spread to the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam?®
15. Why does the author believe that the negotiations of late 1971 A were the most serious yet undertaken,® but they A eventually fell down for the same reasons earlier efforts had failed?®

16. What was the response of the Nixon administration to the Easter Offensive? Was it successful?
17. What were the ultimate results for each side from the Easter Offensive?
18. How did the final stages of the peace negotiations unfold and evolve?
19. What were the responses to the Christmas Day bombings? Did the bombings, according to the author, produce a dramatically different result at the negotiating table?
20. Why does the author argue, in fact, there was no Peace . . . Nor was there honor?

Chapter 8: The Postwar War and the Legacies of Vietnam

Identifications

POW/MIA issue
 A decent interval
 War Powers Act
 A Four Nos
 A flower soldiers
 Battle of Phuoc Long
 Operation A Frequent Wind
 Khmer Rouge
 General Van Pao
 Pol Pot
 A reeducation camps
 A model minority
doi moi
 Vietnam Memorial
 A Rambo
 Powell Doctrine
 Vietnam Syndrome
 Woodcock Mission
 Zbigniew Brzezinski
 A boat people
 National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia
 A Road Map
 Pete Peterson
 Bill Clinton trip to Vietnam

Questions for consideration

1. How did the South Vietnamese and their enemies respond to the Paris Peace Accords?
2. What did Nixon view as his responsibility to the South Vietnamese after the peace?
3. What undermined, according to the author, A Nixon=s ability to dangle carrots or brandish sticks?
4. By the Spring 1974, what was the condition of the South Vietnamese government? What was Washington=s response to calls for more assistance?
5. Why does the author argue that overly optimistic French and U.S. officials had promised a light at the end of the tunnel, but A when the light finally appeared in 1975 it came with a stunning rapidity and brought an outcome that turned a cliché into a cruel irony?
6. Why did the South Vietnamese government collapse so quickly? What was Washington=s response?

7. Why does the author assert that the United States shared with the South Vietnamese leadership responsibility for the debacle of April 1975?
8. He author notes that "as comforting as it has been for Americans to find the cause of failure primarily in South Vietnam's weakness and Washington's errors, these alone do not explain the outcome of the war?" Why does he assert this?
9. What was the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal in Cambodia and Laos?
10. Why does the author believe that "impact on world politics of America's failure in Vietnam was considerably less than U.S. policy makers had predicted?"
11. According to the author, the principal legacy of the war in Vietnam was continued suffering in what ways?
12. What was the ultimate fate of the PRG?
13. Why does the author assert, "even for the ostensible winners, victory was a bittersweet prize?"
14. According the author, "although the United States emerged physically unscathed, the Vietnam War was among the most debilitating in its history." Why?
15. What impact did the Vietnam War have on future U.S. foreign policy?
16. What were the various explanations for the U.S. failures in Vietnam?
17. Why does author believe the President George Bush, Sr.'s statement of the end of the Persian Gulf War that "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all" was premature?
18. Why does the author believe that "many of the so-called lessons are based on historical givens that can never be proved?"
19. What lessons does the author believe can be learned from the Vietnam War?
20. What was the road to normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam?
21. Even by 2000, the author argues that "in the United States . . . the war's influence did not entirely go away." Why?
22. Why does the author believe "the ideological and cultural divides that had helped bring on the war in the first place and had made it so difficult to end still remained?"