

About 140,000 words

Containment and Credibility

The Ideology and Deception that Plunged America into the Vietnam War

by

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## OVERVIEW

In the shadow of yet another war taking shape in the Middle East—this time against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—it is vitally important to understand how the American public is convinced by its leaders to go to war. In Iraq, in 2003, the Bush administration used a simplistic ideology (the War on Terrorism) and lies and half-truths (Saddam Hussein’s supposed nuclear program) to convince the overwhelming majority of Americans to support the disastrous invasion of Iraq. Fifty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson used this same pattern—a simplistic ideology (Cold War containment) and lies and half-truths (the supposed attacks by North Vietnam against U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin)—to convince the American people to fight a war in South Vietnam that eventually cost over 50,000 American lives. During the Vietnam War, however, the President’s lies and half-truths ultimately doomed his war policy.

*Containment and Credibility* explores the role ideology and deception played in how the Vietnam War began and how it eventually ended. Both President Lyndon Johnson and President Richard Nixon used the Cold War ideology of containment of Communism to justify their wars in Vietnam. Initially, opponents of the war attacked the ideology of containment or its application to the war in Vietnam. However, in 1968 opponents of the Vietnam War switched tactics and began to instead attack the President’s credibility. Attacks on the President’s credibility were so successful that they quickly became the dominant critique of the war and were ultimately successful in ending it.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident—in which U.S. destroyers were supposedly attacked on 4 August 1964 by the North Vietnamese—is central to this change of opposition strategy in 1968. Johnson deceptively used the Gulf of Tonkin incident to overcome Congressional skepticism and pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Johnson’s “blank check” to prosecute the war. In 1968, Congressional dissenters used inconsistencies in Johnson’s version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident to undermine the resolution as a weapon against their dissent. For the American people, revelations about the administration’s dishonesty

during the incident simply added to grave doubts that Americans already had about Johnson's credibility; the American people lost confidence in Johnson, ending his Presidency. The dramatic success of this new strategy—attacking the administration's credibility—encouraged other opponents to follow suit, permanently altering the framework of debate over the war.

This change in the opposition's strategy had a number of important consequences. First, this change in opposition rhetoric ultimately forced an end to the war. To sustain his credibility against relentless attack, President Nixon was repeatedly forced to withdraw troops to prove to the American people that he was making good on his pledge to bring the war to an "honorable end." Ultimately, Nixon ran out of troops to withdraw and was forced to accept an unfavorable peace. Second, from the end of the Vietnam War through the end of the Cold War, nearly every time an administration contemplated a military intervention, this framework for public debate from the latter half of the Vietnam War—between advocates using the ideology of containment and opponents attacking the administration's credibility—would reassert itself. Finally, and most importantly, because opponents of the Vietnam War stopped challenging the ideology of containment after 1968, the American public continued to accept this ideology after the Vietnam War and the Cold War continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

*Containment and Credibility* fills a number of important gaps in the history of the Vietnam War. First, the Gulf of Tonkin incident is perhaps one of the most examined moments in the Vietnam War and scholars have conclusively proven that the Johnson administration deceived the Congress about the facts of the incident to gain passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. However, few scholars have asked *why* the administration wanted the resolution so badly that it was willing to lie to get it. This book conclusively proves that the administration wanted the resolution to inoculate itself against Congressional dissent. Moreover, the administration clearly understood that it needed a pretext to gain passage of the Resolution; the Gulf of Tonkin incident provided this pretext. This book fills even more important gaps by showing the role the Gulf of Tonkin incident played in the unravelling of the Johnson Presidency and the behind-the-scenes origin of this devastatingly effective opposition attack.

The question of whether the Cold War consensus ended with the Vietnam War is one of the most hotly debated issues across many academic disciplines, including international relations, political science, and history. *Containment and Credibility* stakes out a unique position; this book argues that the Cold War consensus was both an elite consensus among foreign policymakers and a popular consensus among the American public. Further, this work will show that, while the Cold War consensus among foreign policy leaders was broken, the American public continued to embrace this ideology after the Vietnam War, causing the Cold War to continue into the late 1980's.

*Containment and Credibility* is also unique as a study of the domestic political debate over the Vietnam War. Many studies of the Vietnam War note in passing that the Johnson administration developed a "credibility gap" over time. *Containment and Credibility* actually explores the growth of the "credibility gap" and shows that it was not an accidental occurrence but rather began with a deliberate strategy by Senator J. William Fulbright to end the war. Likewise, most studies of the Vietnam War simply mention in passing that the Johnson administration used Cold War arguments to justify the war. This book actually examines both the Johnson and Nixon administrations' use of the ideology of containment, explaining why they used these arguments and why they were so effective with the American people. Such an in depth analysis is sorely needed as the newest generation of undergraduate and graduate students were born after the Cold War and did not grow up hearing these ideas in the media.

Finally, no other work explores the public debate over this or any other war in such detail. In the aftermath of the recent and very similar debate over the Iraq War—and in the midst of the contemporary debate over the growing war with ISIS—a study of how the American public is convinced to go to war is vitally needed and will be particularly interesting to informed lay readers.

#### TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION

The doctoral dissertation on which *Containment and Credibility* is based is complete. The revision of this dissertation into a book-length manuscript will be complete in April 2014.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lieutenant Colonel Pat Proctor, PhD., is a U.S. Army veteran of both the Iraq and the Afghanistan wars with over 21 years of service in command and staff positions from Fort Hood, Texas to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Lieutenant Colonel Proctor is currently the battalion commander for the Gunner Battalion (4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery) that just returned from Jordan—the front lines of America’s war with ISIS. In 2012, Pat served as the Chief of Plans for Regional Command-East in Afghanistan, planning the transition of the war to Afghan security forces ahead of the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. In 2009, Pat deployed to Iraq as operations officer for Task Force Patriot (2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery), an artillery-turned-infantry battalion battling insurgents in Saddam Hussein’s hometown of Tikrit. In 2007, Pat was drafted to work in Iraq as part of a handpicked, 20-man team of soldiers, scholars, and diplomats commissioned by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker to create a new strategy for the war in Iraq. Pat worked with a State Department counterpart to write the strategic communication plan for what has since become known as the Iraq “surge.”

Pat has written extensively on current affairs, military history, and military simulation topics. He is the author of *Task Force Patriot and the End of Combat Operations in Iraq* (Government Institutes Press, ISBN-13: 978-1-60590-777-2) and co-author of the CliffsNotes book, *ASVAB AFQT Cram Plan* (ISBN-13: 978-0470598894). Lieutenant Colonel Proctor has also written articles for the Phi Alpha Theta history honor society journal, *The Historian*, the U.S. Army War College journal, *Parameters*, Henley-Putnam University’s *Journal of Strategic Security*, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College journal, *Military Review*, and consumer magazines including *Armchair General* and *Military Simulations & Training*. Pat has presented papers at international conferences at locations including the Centre for International Peace and Security Studies in Montreal and the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Additionally, Pat has published articles in online magazines such as *ArmchairGeneral.com*, *Wargamer.com*, and *StrategyPage.com*.

Lieutenant Colonel Proctor holds a doctorate in history from Kansas State University. His first master's degree is in military arts for strategy from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). He also holds a second master's degree in military arts for theater operations from the highly selective School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). Pat holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Purdue University.

Finally, Pat is an occasional marathoner and borderline fitness fanatic. He currently lives in El Paso, Texas, near historic Fort Bliss, with his wife, Aree, and their teenaged son.

## MARKETING PLAN

Pat Proctor has experience publicizing his books in the national media. In addition to book readings, presentations, and signings, he has appeared as a guest to discuss his books on national television on WGN Superstation as well as on radio on NPR's *Tell Me More*, on U.S. Radio Network's *Lou Dobbs Radio Show*, and on countless regional radio shows. Pat has also leveraged his extensive contacts within the security policy establishment to secure endorsements of his books by authors and opinion leaders like Bing West (*No True Glory, The Strongest Tribe*), David Kilcullen (*The Accidental Guerilla, Counterinsurgency*), and Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster (*Dereliction of Duty*). He will bring all of these resources to bear again as *Containment and Credibility* nears publication.

### NATIONAL MEDIA

Throughout his military career, Pat has amassed a large number of contacts in the national news media that he will leverage to market *Containment and Credibility*. In addition to on-air interviews with national radio personalities like Dom Giordano and Michel Martin, Pat has also met with or been interviewed by a number of nationally recognized journalists, including the late John McWethy (ABC News) and Jane Araf (NBC). Pat has been quoted in the past as an expert in the *The Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, *Stars and Stripes*, and many other publications. During his time in Iraq, Pat met with syndicated columnists and writers such as Bing West (*No True Glory, The Strongest Tribe*) and Max Boot (*Savage Wars of Peace*), as well as countless national and regional reporters. Pat will leverage all of these contacts as *Containment and Credibility* nears publication.

Through his longtime interaction with national media figures, Lieutenant Colonel Proctor has amassed a list of over 300 contacts that includes journalists in the national media, national security figures, and opinion leaders. Pat maintains this network through Facebook and all of these individuals



will receive notifications as *Containment and Credibility* nears release, is mentioned in the media, or is publicized by the author at public engagements, magnifying the impact of these events in the national media.

There will be increased coverage of the Vietnam War as a series of significant events from the war reach their fiftieth anniversary. Pat established himself as an authority in the field of military affairs with similar positioning of his last book, *Task Force Patriot*, as he was interviewed by a number of national news programs to comment on the end of the war. With the publication of *Containment and Credibility*, Pat will play a similar role through the fiftieth anniversaries of significant events from the Vietnam War. As events such as the announcement of deployment of large numbers of troops to Vietnam (1965), the Spring Mobilization (1967), and the Tet offensive (1968) reach their fiftieth anniversary, Pat will use his status as an expert on military affairs to speak to the media about these events, publicizing *Containment and Credibility* in the process. Likewise, there will be increased coverage in the military media (the *Army Times*, *Military Review*, *Parameters*, and countless other military publications) as the fiftieth anniversaries of significant battles such as the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley (1965) and the Battle of Khe Sanh (1967-68) pass. As a recognized military figure who has published, been interviewed, and had works reviewed in these publications in the past, Lieutenant Colonel Pat Proctor will be in a unique position to speak on these moments in history—and publicize *Containment and Credibility*—as these anniversaries pass.

Pat has also appeared as a guest speaker at the McCormick Foundation's First Division Museum in Chicago to promote his books, drawing important media attention in this large, Midwestern market. Pat has already been invited to return to this venue to talk about *Containment and Credibility*, and will secure other speaking engagements at prominent libraries, bookstores, universities, museums, and international relations organizations and "think tanks" in the New York, Washington, DC, and Chicago areas as the publication of *Containment and Credibility* approaches.

## THE ACADEMIC MARKET

As *Containment and Credibility* nears release, Pat Proctor will publish three separate journal articles on topics related to this book in prominent American history journals. Rather than being directly excerpted from the book, these articles are on supporting topics that will whet the appetite of scholars in the field for the release of the book. And of course, in the “about the author” section of each of these articles, the impending release of the book will be prominently mentioned.

In the past, Pat has appeared and presented his work at a number of academic conferences in the field of international relations such as the International Conference of the Centre for International Peace and Security Studies and the Global Studies Conference. He will return to these and similar conferences to speak, leverage the cross-discipline appeal of *Containment and Credibility*, and solicit reviews and interviews for the book as it nears publication.

A few institutions will be particular targets of Pat’s efforts in the academic market. Pat recently received his doctorate in history from Kansas State University. Pat is also a close friend of the new head of the military science department (and director of the Reserve Officer Training Corps) at Kansas State University. This university has a strong relationship with the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), where Pat completed two master’s degree programs. Lieutenant Colonel Proctor’s deep ties with these two schools gives him the inside track toward getting *Containment and Credibility* included in courses at these institutions, as well as at the U.S. Army War College. Around 8,000 students pass through senior military colleges each year. Kansas State University enrolls over 20,000 students each year. Each of these institutions also maintains a sizable library which will almost certainly be interested in bulk orders.

## ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

In addition to his work as a writer, Lieutenant Colonel Proctor also runs a small computer wargaming company that markets to military enthusiasts, military organizations, and large defense contractors. Pat will leverage his standing in the wargaming community to market *Containment and*

*Credibility*. This community is a great market for military history books; it is the nexus of security professionals, military retirees, historians, and enthusiasts, all of whom buy and read books about war and history. The author has successfully marketed his books and computer wargames in this community for over a decade. As a result, his name is very well known in this community and he has established himself not only as a great game developer, but also as an authority on national security policy, military affairs, and history.

The author maintains a Website for his commercial wargaming company ([www.prosimco.com](http://www.prosimco.com)) that is also well known in this community. In addition to information about his games, it offers free game demos and multiplayer gaming support which draws between 30,000 and 50,000 hits per month. Pat also maintains a connected Website for his work as a writer ([www.prosimco.com/writing](http://www.prosimco.com/writing)). Pat hosts a connected blog, *Media Warfare* ([mediawarfare.blogspot.com](http://mediawarfare.blogspot.com)), where he reviews books, posts articles about the War on Terrorism, and markets his books and articles in other publications. He has also established a FaceBook page for his writing (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Pat-Proctor/14992636843>) and a page specifically for his book *Task Force Patriot and the End of Combat Operations in Iraq* (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Pat-Proctor/14992636843>). These sites allow readers to interact with him, ask questions, and provide comment about his work. Pat will establish a similar page specifically for *Containment and Credibility* as it nears release.

Pat has written numerous articles for print and online magazines, such as *Armchair General* and *Wargamer.com*, that cater to the wargaming community. The author has also had his books and wargames reviewed and provided interviews in these and other magazines for years. As a result, Pat knows many of the writers for electronic gaming, wargaming, and simulation industry magazines. He will use these established contacts to garner reviews for and interviews about *Containment and Credibility*. Pat will also submit a series of articles to these magazines on topics related to *Containment and Credibility* before and after publication.

Over more than a decade of marketing to the wargaming community, Pat has amassed contact information for over two thousand wargamers, service members, and defense and commercial gaming

industry professionals. Pat also maintains an e-mail list for each of his games and frequently provides blog entries and forum posts on popular wargaming Websites in this community. Pat will use all of these tools to publicize *Containment and Credibility* as it nears release.

Not all of Pat's marketing efforts in the wargaming community will be behind the keyboard. Pat has twice appeared at the Origins Game Convention in Columbus, Ohio. He will return to promote *Containment and Credibility* after its publication.

#### THE MILITARY MARKET

There is a great deal of interest in the topic of this book—the dynamics of a domestic political debate over war—across the military. Pat is a lifetime member of both the Association of the United States Army and the U.S. Army Field Artillery Association and will leverage these memberships in order to secure reviews for and interviews about *Containment and Credibility* in these associations' magazines. Pat will also secure reviews of *Containment and Credibility* in other prominent military journals, where his works have been published in the past.

Finally, as a book written by an active duty service member on a topic of interest to service members, *Containment and Credibility* will almost certainly be a featured publication at the more than 3,500 post, base, and naval exchanges on military installations worldwide (including in Iraq and Afghanistan).

## MARKET ANALYSIS

The total market for *Containment and Credibility: The Ideology and Deception that Plunged America into the Vietnam War* is as many as 500,000 people. While it is a serious study of the domestic political debate over the Vietnam War that will be engaging to graduate students, it is written to appeal to both undergraduates and interested laypeople.

There has been a resurgence of interest in the Vietnam era in America, no doubt fueled by historical television dramas like AMC's *Mad Men* (a peak of 3.5 million viewers and 1.6 million viewers in the 18–49 demographic) and documentaries like CNN's *The Sixties* (1.4 million viewers including 284,000 adults 25-54). The success of *The Sixties* even inspired CNN to re-air its older series, *The Cold War*, which met with similar success.

This increase in public interest in the Vietnam era has corresponded with a series of new books on this period, including *The Nixon Tapes, 1971-1972* (Douglas Brinkley, Luke Nichter, 2014) and *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (Fredrik Logevall, 2012, Pulitzer Prize Winner, one of the *Washington Post's* "Best Books of the Year"). Many new books on the Vietnam War have centered on the impact of the war on the home front in the United States. *The Morenci Marines: A Tale of Small Town America and the Vietnam War* (Kyle Longley, 2014) explores the impact of the war on one Arizona town while *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Daniel S. Lucks, 2014) explores the intersection of the war and the civil rights movement in America.

While *Containment and Credibility* is a serious history of the public debate over the Vietnam War, it is written to appeal to the interested lay person. It is a survey of the entire Vietnam War with concise descriptions of particular events that are helpful to readers who might not be immediately familiar with the details of the war. These readers buy books about the Vietnam War; Karl Marlantes' *Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War* (2010) debuted at number fourteen on the *LA Times* bestseller list.

*Containment and Credibility* will also appeal to an academic audience. This book is written to be immediately accessible to the undergraduate reader. There are currently over eighteen million students enrolled as undergraduates in two- or four-year programs across the United States. Within this population, this book targets the over 120,000 history majors. However, many other undergraduate degree programs also require a limited number of history or humanities courses; these students, too, are a part of the market for *Containment and Credibility*. This book, which challenges much of the mainstream historiography of the Vietnam War, will be particularly appealing to graduate students. There are over three million students enrolled in graduate programs across the United States. Within this population, the primary audience for this book is graduate students in history (nearly 4,000 students). However, graduate students in other disciplines such as international relations, security studies, and strategic studies also frequently take history courses for which this book would be appropriate.

## COMPETING WORKS

*Containment and Credibility* is unique in the field of Vietnam War history for a number of reasons. First, it is not focused on the fighting of the war or on the actions of only one of the actors in the public debate over the war—the President, the Congress, the media, or the antiwar movement. Rather this book focuses on the public debate in the United States between all of these actors, and the effect that this debate had on the American people and their support for the war. Moreover, this is not just an examination of one administration or one period in the war. *Containment and Credibility* is an examination of the political debate over the entirety of the war and the impact that this debate had on U.S. foreign policy well after the war was over. While the scope of this book is unique, there are a number of successful books that cover elements that are also discussed in *Containment and Credibility*.

- *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory*, Penny Lewis (ILR Press, multiple editions, 2013, 272 pages, \$19.35, ISBN: 978-0801478567) attempts to shatter the myth that the Vietnam War debate was between wealthy, elite “Doves” and working class “Hawks” and attempts to uncover why this myth arose in the first place. While *Containment and Credibility* covers many of the same groups arguing for and against the war, it is focused less on the people and groups making the arguments than the arguments they were making and why they were making them.
- *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism*, Sandra Scanlon (University of Massachusetts, multiple editions, 2013, 352 pages, \$26.06, ISBN: 978-1625340184), part of the “Culture, Politics, and the Cold War” series from the University of Massachusetts, shows the ways in which support for the Vietnam War galvanized the conservative movement in America, creating the Nixon and Reagan eras. *Containment and Credibility* explores not just the pro-war movement, but also

- the fragmented antiwar movement. Moreover, it focuses more on the impact of this debate on future debates over foreign policy than on the fortunes of either political party.
- *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*, Fredrik Logevall (University of California, multiple editions, 2001, 557 pages, \$33.95, ISBN: 978-0520229198) examines the decisions of the Johnson administration that led to America's war in Vietnam. *Containment and Credibility* differs from this book, first, in that it covers the entire war, not just its initiation. However, *Containment and Credibility* also examines the Johnson administration's effort to sell the war to the American people, rather than on its decisions about whether or not to engage in the war.
  - *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War: Evil was Loose in the World*, George Bogaski (Lexington Books, multiple editions, 2014, 228 pages, \$81.00, ISBN: 978-0739179963) explores the role of Protestant churches both in supporting and opposing the Vietnam War, and the impact the Vietnam debate had on these churches. *Containment and Credibility* is a much broader examination of the Vietnam War debate across American society, focusing not just on religious but also secular arguments for and against the war.
  - *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*, H. R. McMaster (HarperCollins, 1997, multiple editions, 446 pages, \$27.50, ISBN: 978-0060929084) is the seminal work on the administration's deceptive use of the Gulf of Tonkin incident to gain passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and escalate the war in Vietnam. However, the scope of *Containment and Credibility*—covering both the Johnson and Nixon administration—is much broader than McMaster's work. *Containment and Credibility* also expands on McMaster's study of the Johnson administration's lies to explain *why* the administration lied. *Containment and Credibility* then goes on to show how these lies would later undermine Johnson's policies in Vietnam during the 1968 Fulbright hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident.



All of these books focus on one period (the early Johnson administration) or one facet (the media, the church, or conservatives) of the debate over the war. *Containment and Credibility* shows the interaction of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, the Congress, the press, and the antiwar movement as they fought for American public opinion throughout the war. Moreover, this book demonstrates that this battle for public opinion had a lasting effect on both public debate of foreign policy and the American public's continued belief in the Cold War consensus well beyond the Vietnam War.

## BOOK OUTLINE

### FORMAT AND LENGTH

*Containment and Credibility* consists of acknowledgements, an introduction, six chapters, and a bibliography. Citations will be included as footnotes. The manuscript will also include 5 black-and-white line drawings (political cartoons that appeared in newspapers during the Vietnam era). The total length of the manuscript will be about 300 pages and 140,000 words.

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

#### Introduction

The United States is in the grips of a new foreign policy ideology—the War on Terror. According to this ideology, Islamic extremists must be defeated abroad before they can perpetrate terrorist attacks inside the United States. This ideology was forged in the fires of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. This ideology blossomed in the days after 9/11, as anthrax-laden letters arrived at Congressional offices and newsrooms and shoe bombers and underwear bombers boarded planes to conduct further attacks. It has reshaped what infringements the American people are willing to accept on their liberties as they board planes, talk on their cell phones, or use the Internet. This ideology has also spawned two wars, the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, that have cost the United States trillions of dollars and over 6,000 American lives. And, as this work is being written, the War on Terror ideology has embroiled the United States in yet another war, this time in Iraq and Syria against the heirs to al Qaida in Iraq—the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The Cold War ideology of containment of 50 years earlier was no less powerful. This ideology was forged in the fire of World War II, the bloodiest conflict in the history of mankind. It blossomed in

American politics amid fear of atomic annihilation and paranoia about Communist infiltration in the 1950s. By 1964, an entire generation had grown up knowing no other framework for public debate over foreign policy; the American public *believed* that it was necessary to contain Communist expansion, using military force if necessary. President Johnson tapped into this ideology to convince Americans that Communists were trying to expand into Southeast Asia through South Vietnam and had to be opposed by force. The resulting war cost over 50,000 American lives.

This introduction will briefly review some of the historical arguments over these topics and explain some of the major concepts discussed in *Containment and Credibility*, including the Cold War consensus and the ideology of containment, to make the book more accessible to undergraduates and interested lay readers.

### Chapter 1: Creating a Consensus on Vietnam

President Lyndon B. Johnson inherited the Vietnam War from President John F. Kennedy after Kennedy's assassination in November 1963. Until August 1964, Johnson and his administration used the containment of Communism to argue for the direct use of U.S. military force in Vietnam but were unsuccessful in convincing the American people or the Congress to support intervention. The administration concluded that, before it could use U.S. forces in Vietnam, it needed a pretext in the form of a North Vietnamese provocation. Johnson also believed he needed a Congressional resolution endorsing the use of force to protect him from Congress in case the war later became unpopular (as it had during the Korean War). A supposed attack against U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin on 4 August 1964 provided the pretext for retaliatory air strikes and passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. However, the administration lied to the Congress about some key facts of this incident in order to get passage of the resolution. In fact, the attack almost certainly didn't happen. These lies would come back to haunt President Johnson in 1968.

## Chapter 2: The “Americanization” of the Vietnam War

With the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—its insurance policy against Congressional dissent—in hand, the administration began a dramatic escalation of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam that culminated on 28 July 1965 with the introduction of large numbers of U.S. ground troops in South Vietnam. Throughout this period, the President used the containment of Communism to justify this escalation while a growing array of opponents—from radical protesters to academics to a few members of Congress—began to protest this escalation. Almost all of that dissent was focused on attacking the ideology of containment itself or the application of that ideology to Vietnam.

## Chapter 3: Breaking the Political Stalemate

For two years after the introduction of large numbers of U.S. troops in Vietnam in July 1965, the administration continued to escalate the war until a half-million American troops were fighting for their lives in the jungles of Vietnam. The framework for debate over the war established in the first half of 1965—between the administration using containment to justify the war and opponents attacking the administration’s use of containment—continued to assert itself throughout this escalation. And most Americans continued to support the administration and its Cold War justifications for the escalation. Moreover, while Congress began to increasingly oppose the war, its public opposition was quieted by the President’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In 1967, this framework began to change. A few opponents of the war in the media began to attack the administration’s credibility rather than its use of containment. At the same time, the administration began making wildly optimistic predictions for the future in Vietnam. Then, two Associated Press reporters published an obscure article questioning the administration’s account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The stage was set for a dramatic change in the public debate over the war.

#### Chapter 4: Collapse of Credibility

In late 1967, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—and its chairman Senator J. William Fulbright—made the fateful decision to stop attacking the administration’s use of containment to justify the war and instead attack the administration’s credibility on the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The Fulbright hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident would begin in early 1968, just as the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launched a massive, nationwide attack against U.S. and South Vietnamese forces—the Tet Offensive—that called into question all of the administration’s rosy predictions of success in Vietnam from 1967. This deluge of evidence of administration deceit convinced most Americans that their President had been lying to them. Americans lost confidence in Johnson and he was forced to withdraw from the Presidential race and stop escalating the war.

The perceived success of this new opposition strategy—attacking the President’s credibility rather than his use of containment—combined with the failure of antiwar candidates who continued to attack the administration’s Cold War justifications for the war in Vietnam, convinced almost all opponents of the war to adopt this new strategy, permanently changing the framework of debate over the war.

#### Chapter 5: Ending the Vietnam War

The new framework for public debate over the Vietnam War established in 1968—between the administration using containment to justify the war and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—would remain the framework for debate through the end of the war. To sustain his credibility against relentless attack, President Richard Nixon used troop withdrawals to prove he was making good on his promise to bring the war to an “honorable end.” But he could not use this tactic forever; there were only so many troops in Vietnam to withdraw. In the face of a series of blows to his credibility—including the Cambodian Incursion, the disastrous invasion of Laos, the results of the My Lai massacre trial, the protests by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and the release of the Pentagon Papers—the President

ran out of troops to withdraw and was forced to accept a humiliating compromise peace that set the stage for the final destruction of South Vietnam.

### Chapter 6: Reliving the Vietnam War

The decision of war opponents to change tactics in 1968—from attacking the administration’s use of containment to justifying the war to attacking its credibility—had a number of lasting consequences that continued beyond the war. First, through a brief review of foreign policy debates during the Ford and Reagan administrations, *Containment and Credibility* will show that the framework for debate established in 1968—between supporters of intervention using the ideology of containment and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—reemerged whenever administrations proposed U.S. military interventions. Second, and more importantly, this book will show that, because opponents of the war stopped attacking the ideology of containment in 1968, the American people continued to embrace the tenets of the Cold War consensus until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

*Containment and Credibility* will conclude with a disconcerting prediction for the future of the War on Terror in light of the durability of the Cold War consensus after the Vietnam War. The developing American war on ISIS is a troubling sign that the War on Terror ideology remains largely intact after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, just as the ideology of containment survived the Vietnam War. After the Vietnam War, Cold War presidents were restrained from future military interventions by the opposition strategy of attacks on presidential credibility that developed in the latter half of the Vietnam War. However, unlike the Vietnam War, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were not undone by the Bush administration’s deceptions and half-truths. Thus, the War on Terror has no analogous opposition strategy to restrain presidents from future disastrous military adventures. The enduring power of the War on Terror ideology with the American people may well doom the United States to a future of perpetual war in the Middle East.