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H-Diplo

Conference Review

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Part I of H-Diplo Conference Review of *The American Experience in Southeast Asia, 1946-1975*, a conference organized by the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, and held from 29-30 September 2010 in Washington, D.C.
<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/videos-transcripts> .

URL: <http://h-diplo.org/reports/PDF/AmericanExperience-SEAsia-Introduction.pdf>

Introduction by **Thomas Maddux**, California State University, Northridge

The U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian hosted a conference on “The American Experience in Southeast Asia, 1946-1975” in Washington D.C. on September 29-30, 2010. (<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/videos-transcripts>)

The conference recognized the completion of over two dozen volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series covering Indochina from 1946 to 1975. The conference featured a number of officials who participated in the Vietnam conflict such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and a number of panels of historians. They have online videos of each session as well as transcripts for each participant. The Program and panels are listed below.

The American Experience in Southeast Asia, 1946-1975

- Opening Address by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
<<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/secretary-clinton>>
- Address by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/secretary-kissinger>>
- Keynote Address by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke
<<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/ambassador-holbrooke>>
- The View from Hanoi: Historians from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
<<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/view-from-hanoi>>
- Senior Scholars’ Interpretations of the American Experience in Southeast Asia
<<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/senior-scholars>>

- Media Roundtable Discussion <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/media-roundtable>>
- Address by Ambassador John D. Negroponte <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/ambassador-negroponte>>
- With Friends Like These: The United States and its Allies <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/with-friends-like-these>>
- Fighting While Negotiating: Force and Diplomacy in the Vietnam War <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/fighting-while-negotiating>>
- The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Counterinsurgency and Reconstruction Programs in Vietnam <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/battle-for-hearts-and-minds>>
- Ours to Reason Why: Intervention in Vietnam, Reaction in America <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/ours-to-reason-why>>

H-Diplo invited Mark Moyar and Jeffery Kimball to review and comment on the online materials from the conference. They disagree at times with the assessments presented, the wisdom of policies pursued and as well as those not implemented, and the consequences for the United States of the Vietnam conflict. They also offer somewhat different perspectives on the lessons to be learned from Vietnam. The value of the *FRUS* series for historical scholarship is recognized by Moyar who suggests that some of the officials and historians need to rely more on the contemporary primary sources in *FRUS* and less on questionable hindsight opinions, such as the question of whether the U.S. ever had a chance to achieve its main objective in Vietnam. Kimball, however, concludes that historians need to draw more lessons from past experiences like Vietnam and current policy-makers should consult more with historians who have studied past wars before launching the next one.

Participants:

Jeffrey P. Kimball is Professor Emeritus of History at Miami University (Ohio, USA). He is the author of many scholarly articles and book chapters on diplomacy, war, peace, and historiography from the early nineteenth century to the Vietnam War and its legacy in the twenty-first. His books are *To Reason Why: The Debate About the Causes of American Involvement in the Vietnam War* (1990); *Nixon's Vietnam War* (1998), which was a History Book Club selection and received the Ohio Academy of History Book Award and the Robert Ferrell Book Prize; and *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy* (2004), which won the Arthur Link/Warren Kuehl Prize and has also been published in Vietnam. Kimball is presently completing a book with William Burr on the history of nuclear threat-making.

Mark Moyar is the Director of Research at Orbis Operations, in which capacity he travels frequently to Afghanistan and other sites of irregular conflict. He is the author of *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (Yale University Press, 2009); *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Naval Institute Press, 1997, and University of Nebraska Press, 2007). Moyar's writings have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications. He holds a B.A. summa cum laude from Harvard and a Ph.D. from Cambridge.

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