



Author Series
September 27, 2011
Washington, DC

Marvin and Deborah Kalb
Journalists and Co-authors

Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama

Donna Constantinople: Good evening everyone and welcome. We're so happy that you all could make it tonight. The Women's Foreign Policy Group loves to host these book events as they are very popular along with our Embassy Series. We are about promoting women's leadership in foreign policy and international relations, and our members represent a wide cross-section of that. They're involved either through corporations, non-profits, or NGOs, and they have achieved seniority and prestige in their positions. We feel really honored when we're all together and can learn about what everyone is doing—and of course we have our embassy program—but part of the heart and soul of what we do is we mentor young women, and so we have with us tonight our current group of interns. They come from all across the country and are with us for three to four months at a time, and they get great exposure to what is going on in the field and it's a fascinating thing to watch the development of their interests and passions. Many of them speak many languages or at least a few—a lot of them are interested in things like national security and some of the technical aspects of foreign policy as well as diplomacy. So we try to work with them very closely through a mentoring program at GWU and also in New York at New York University and Columbia, and it's something we want to expand. So that's a little about us. We are so pleased, and I am personally very pleased to have the Kalbs with us tonight. I worked on a project a number of years ago on the anniversary of the fall of Saigon for Discovery Channel—they did a film and we brought together a lot of people who were there at the time for that momentous event. I love the anecdote in the book that talks about Stanley Karnow who was a part of that evening and who you would never forget had you met him—he wrote that seminal book on Vietnam and there's this great anecdote in the book that the Kalbs have written about Richard Holbrooke, who spoke to us not even a year ago. So Holbrooke summons General McChrystal and says, "I'm going to get someone on the phone here who can tell us about a lesson in legacy," so he gets Stanley Karnow on the phone and Stanley says, "What the hell are you doing in Afghanistan? Get out!" [*Laughter.*] And that was the conversation—but this book is so enjoyable from that point of view, and I'm going to introduce Pat Ellis who is the president of Women's Foreign Policy Group and she will introduce Marvin and Deborah.

Patricia Ellis: Donna, thank you so much. Hello everyone and welcome. We're so pleased you could join us tonight on this very special occasion. As Donna said, this is one of our favorite series, the Author Series, and first I would like to thank Nick and Donna for their very warm hospitality and opening their beautiful home to us. Thank you all for coming. Donna has told you a little about the organization and I'm just going to say a few words. As I said, this is one of our favorite series and we're very excited to have two very accomplished journalists, our first father and daughter team, so this is a lot of fun for us. And it's a historical book, but it's very timely as well because we keep hearing references to Vietnam over and over again in the context of Afghanistan and Iraq. In preparation for this we did a search and there are more and more articles that raise this issue, and so we are going to hear about how it has affected so many different presidents in so many different ways—it's very fascinating so you are in for a real treat. Just to give you a quick update on what we have coming up—we have another Author Series next week and that's with Robin Wright on her new book *Rock the Casbah*. Also we're very happy to announce that our next Celebrating Women Leaders event on November 3rd is going to be with Senator Dianne Feinstein, so we hope that everybody will be able to join us. I would also like to

recognize a couple of our board members who are here—Isabel Jasinowski and Gail Kitch, someone who Marvin knows—so there are lots of connections here, and so it's with great pleasure that I introduce Marvin and Deborah. I also have a personal connection with Marvin—he was the founding director of the Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard and I had the privilege of being a fellow there in 1989 and it was just an absolutely wonderful experience, so thank you so much Marvin. As you all know, Marvin is a very well-known award winning journalist. He was a journalist and commentator for CBS, known as one of the Murrow Boys, and for NBC he served as chief diplomatic correspondent, Moscow bureau chief, and *Meet the Press* moderator. Most recently in addition to being a professor at Harvard he has hosted something called the *Kalb Report*, and in the midst of all this he's managed to write 12 books. And then we have Deborah, who has been working as a journalist for a long time. She has already written two historical books and has written and been the editor for a number of publications including *The Hill*, *Gannett*, and *US News & World Report*, and continues to be very active in writing. So please join me in welcoming Marvin and Deborah Kalb. Again, thank you all for joining us, and I'll turn it over to you two. [Applause.]

Marvin Kalb: Pat, thank you very much. Appreciate the introduction and thank you to the Constantinople's for having us here this evening. Pat earlier today sent an email to me and Debbie that said we would both have ten minutes to talk, and I could not help but think that I have come out of an environment where speaking to time is absolutely essential, and one story comes to mind—I can't resist telling this story. On August 20, 1968, I was with Debbie and Judy, my wife—we were out on the end of Long Island. August 20th is Debbie's birthday, and we were celebrating her birthday and having a good time. Sometime during the late morning Cronkite calls me and he says, "The Russians have just invaded Czechoslovakia and you have to get back here immediately." I said, "Walter you don't understand it's Debbie's birthday," and he said, "I know, wish her a happy birthday and get into the car and get back here." So I picked myself up and started driving in and was thinking of the story—why did the Russians invade? I got in and Cronkite said to take as much time as I liked but to tell him why the Russians invaded—but being no fool I knew that what he meant was that somewhere in the neighborhood of two minutes, no more than that, so I wrote a two-minute piece and gave it to him. He said great, put it on camera—those were the days when you had to put it on camera and develop the film and all that, so I did that and then somewhere around 5:00 in the afternoon he calls me back and says, "Marvin I'm sorry to tell you this but we just got footage with Morley Safer on the ground there and of the Russian tanks literally coming into Prague, so if you don't mind, could you explain why the Russians invaded in one minute instead of two?" I said, "No problem, I'll cut it down, it's not going to be as substantive but it'll give you the headline." So that was fine I did it and re-taped it and then as we got desperately close to 6:30, it was around 5:45, he calls me in once again and says, "I hate to tell you this but we have some fantastic footage that's just come in of a fire in New Orleans where the whole building is on fire and we have close-ups of shots of the flame so could you cut out 15 seconds and tell us why the Russians invaded in 45 seconds?" [Laughter.] So I can tell you all about the haunting legacy of Vietnam in ten minutes.

The key thing to remember is this isn't just another book about Vietnam—Stanley Karnow has written *the* great book on Vietnam War—John Prados has done a marvelous study picking up some of the most recent stuff. I think this is the first book to focus on the impact of the war, the haunting legacy of the war, and the many ways it impacts our foreign policy. So I'm going back in a sense to talking about that period in history from April 30, 1975 to today. A second major point is, it is very difficult for any nation to lose a war. Many nations have lost many wars, but up until Vietnam, the United States had never lost a war. We had come out of the Greatest Generation of WWII, we more or less ignored the stalemate in Korea, and we got into Vietnam in a very slow, awkward way—we intruded into a colonial experience that the French were having in Indochina. We didn't mean to, it wasn't the plan of any president to involve us in Vietnam, it just happened. When a great nation like the US, and even though we have some trouble today we are still a great nation—when a great nation has a huge trauma, which the loss of Vietnam was, it has a profound, deep, continuing, lasting impact on the way in which we think of ourselves, the way in which we think of ourselves vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and the way in which we consider future military involvements for American troops.

Every single time an American president, the last seven of which we deal with Haunting Legacy, considers sending troops to war they all have in mind Vietnam. They think, "Can we ever get out of doing this again?" But each one does it in his own way, so it's quite remarkable that you will have seven presidents faced with similar responsibilities coming to very different conclusions sometimes. Ronald Reagan, for example, who when 241 American Marines were murdered by Islamic fanatics in Beirut in October 1983 did nothing. It was stunning, 241 Marines, you don't lose that many—Reagan did nothing because as he explained to a number of his friends in a magnificent set of letters that he wrote, Reagan said that the American people had been spooked by Vietnam, and that he didn't want to put them through a similar experience again. So within three months as you may remember, we pulled out of Lebanon. We didn't want to touch it.

That's one presidential response—another is Bush I. There was something called the Powell Doctrine, which emerged out of the Vietnam War. It emerged out of the Weinberger Doctrine which emerged out of the Reagan vision of keep your distance, don't get us involved again. And one of the things that Colin Powell said and wrote and thought about at the time when he was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was that if we go to war again, it cannot be the way we did in Vietnam. It's going to be with the use of overwhelming military force. If we can do the job with 100,000, we're going to send in 500,000, which is what we did. We're going to go in on our timetable, we're not going to be sucked into the war the way we were in Vietnam—it's going to be our choice. As a great power, we're going to decide what we're going to do, we're going to decide the timetable, we're going to have an exit strategy before we even go in, we're going to have the support of the American people. It was asking a lot but that was exactly what was on his mind, and Bush I bought into it lock, stock and barrel. We sent 540,000 troops in 1991 to the Persian Gulf to do a job that Powell later told us could be done comfortably with 120,000 troops. And people said, "why did you send all those troops," and he said "never again Vietnam, never again."

Of all of the seven presidents, the one who fascinates us the most is the guy who lives in the White House right now. Obama had no reason to carry any Vietnam baggage with him. He was 13 years old when Vietnam ended in 1975. He could not have escaped to Canada to avoid service. He could not have jumped through hoops as Bill Clinton did to avoid service. He had no weight that he carried that had the label of Vietnam on it and yet it's one of the most remarkable things about this guy. In July 2008, when he was campaigning for office, he went on an obligatory trip that a presidential candidate has to make to the battlefield. So he went to Iraq and Afghanistan. It's a 14-hour flight from Andrews Air Force Base to Kuwait City. He took two of his buddies with him, one a Republican, Chuck Hagel, and one a Democrat, Jack Reed. In the 14 hours on the plane, he asked them questions. What did he ask them about—and remember, he was going to Afghanistan—of course he asked them about Vietnam, he asked them about Vietnam over and over again. And the two senators who were with him were absolutely flabbergasted. And it was not just the ride there but on the ride back, he kept asking them questions about Vietnam—what did we do wrong? What did Johnson do? How do I avoid that if I become president? And then when he does become president, what is the first significant decision he makes? He sends 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan because he got reports from the CIA that if we did not beef up the American troop levels in Afghanistan then we were going to lose in Afghanistan. He could have said at the time, I've only been president for a month, I don't have to accept that responsibility, let it be Bush II. I don't have to deal with that. But what he did was after a long briefing and detailed examination of policy, he sent in an additional 33,000 troops so we now have roughly 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. The process of withdrawal has begun but it's going to be a long, long process. And he has become as absorbed with Vietnam as any of the others. We were told that on a couple of occasions during that extraordinary summer of 2009, he would slip into the office of one of his colleagues at the White House, lean on one of the guy's or gal's desks and say, "are we making the same mistakes that Johnson made? Are we getting ourselves sucked into a situation over which we have no control? Is this another Vietnam?"

Publicly, that was disowned, and when Dick Holbrooke would raise the issue of Vietnam at meetings at the White House, Obama would in front of everybody get furious and shut Dick up. As a matter of fact, he twice got so angry with Holbrooke that he seriously considered firing him and didn't only because of Hillary Clinton, who loved Dick. So the haunting legacy of this war is there with us on every major event. And now I'll turn it over to Debbie.

Deborah Kalb: Thank you all so much for coming and thanks to Pat for organizing this, the Constantinople's for hosting us, and to all of you for being here. One thing that keeps coming up is, how did you decide to write a book with your father, how did that keep coming up, and it goes back to 2005—we have been working on this book a long time and did not think it would take us six years to get it done—it started because we were both interested in the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth Campaign against John Kerry and the impact that those ads had on voters and on Kerry's loss to George W. Bush. We thought very hard about doing a book that covered that and then went back and looked at negative campaign ads going back into the '80s with the Willie Horton issue being used against Michael Dukakis.

We didn't really get too far with publishers on that concept, so we did more research and went back and thought, "How can we use all this material that we've already gathered about John Kerry and the swift boats." We had talked a lot with many of the swift boat people and with Kerry and his aides, and we decided that Vietnam, which is a subject we are both very interested in and had been for a long time, was the framework that we would use for the book. So the information on Kerry and the Swift Boat campaign is still in the book, its Chapter 8, the only chapter that doesn't deal with a president, so that was a little different. But most of the other chapters it's either one or two chapters on each president in terms of his background, biography, personality, how he was affected by the war as a person, how his campaign for the White House was affected by Vietnam, how that came into play, and then the bulk of the chapter has to do with the foreign policy decision-making. So part of it is the actual decision-making, part of it is the politics of foreign policy and how do the politics play into the decision that each president finally made.

We have three different generations of presidents in the book—the first is the Greatest Generation, the WWII generation, which are the first several presidents that we look at, starting with Gerald Ford. Jimmy Carter actually just missed service in World War II, but he still falls into this category. These presidents were basically middle-aged men at the time of the war, it was their children in many cases who were making decisions about whether to go, and those first few presidents were already serving in Congress or were governors during those years. The second generation that we look at is the Baby Boom generation and that started in 1988 with Dan Quayle being put onto the ticket by George H.W. Bush and the impact that had on the coverage of that campaign. All of sudden the issue was back to 1969 and what Dan Quayle did. Well, he joined the Indiana National Guard and how he did that, how he used connections and family background to get into that and that became the big topic that was talked about and covered by the press coming out of the Republican National Convention in 1988. Every four years the same issues came up again in terms of what did this particular man do—whoever it was that was running. Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the war was going on and people had to make those choices. Each time the person who had served in Vietnam did not end up in the White House and the person who had avoided Vietnam ended up in the White House, so that was an interesting pattern that comes up. We have sections in each chapter that deals with those political aspects of Vietnam and how it affected them.

One thing that is very interesting is the last chapter of the book in which you see the politics coming into play with the foreign policy. The last chapter is called, "Good Enough," and it's the second chapter on President Obama in the book, and it goes up almost to the present time dealing mostly with Afghanistan. My father mentioned a lot of what's in the chapters on Obama but the point of this last chapter is how do you get out of Afghanistan in a way that is perceived as good enough, how do you define "good enough," and what constitutes a victory or a loss, and there's sort of this nebulous, undefined area that people can use to say ok, this will be good enough for us, and we can get out and

say that we didn't lose. It's not going to be another case of being accused of the "who lost China" debate after 1949 when Democrats were accused of losing China, that is not the kind of thing President Obama would want to have attached to him. So it's hard to define in the post-Vietnam era how to disengage in a way, and this sort of gets back to the Powell doctrine too, how do you engage in a way that is perceived as palatable for the American public, especially for a President who is running for re-election. So basically what I'm getting at is that each of these chapters, while it is a foreign policy book, also deals with the politics of this decision-making process and how that plays out, and we have various examples of that throughout the book. Now I would like to invite any questions that you may have.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you very much, that was great. *[Applause.]* I am going to open it up first with a few questions and then we will go to the audience. First of all, I wanted to start off with a couple of process questions, and one is, how did you divide up the work? How did that work out?

Deborah Kalb: Well, the way we divided it up for the most part is, well, my father as most of you know spent many, many years covering the State Department and had covered many of these officials, the presidents, and the national security advisors going way back. Really he did the first draft of most of the foreign policy sections, and I mostly as a reporter was covering Congress and covering campaigns so I did more of the first draft of the biographical and political sections, and then we exchanged material and went back and forth and edited. It worked out really well.

Patricia Ellis: Marvin, any comment?

Marvin Kalb: Yes, the comment is that Debbie did 95% of the editing. She did most of the editing and for those of you who read the book, I am very proud of the fact that this is a wonderfully edited book, it's so smooth, I mean you cannot tell there are two writing styles at all and if there's any mistake in the use or misuse of a verb, I did it. *[Laughter.]*

Patricia Ellis: How about the frame you used, using presidents as a way to look at the legacy of Vietnam, how did you come to that decision?

Marvin Kalb: Well you will notice in the book that we didn't have any interviews with any presidents—that was a deliberate decision. Obviously some of them have passed so we couldn't, but of the ones who are still alive, we made no attempt to speak to any of them because I never believed for an instant that I would be told the truth—and that is a very sad admission to have to make but it is absolutely the truth. I cannot imagine Jimmy Carter telling me the truth about the Iran hostage crisis, the Russian move into Afghanistan, his allowing Brzezinski to set up an anti-communist, anti-Soviet, unofficial military alliance using the mujahedeen to fight the Russians, to build them up, because right now they are the people we are fighting in Afghanistan once again. So it's very tricky for a president to acknowledge what it is that he did during the time that he was in power, so we decided not to do it that way at all, but to use each president as a framework of analysis. Anybody who has been around this city and who knows the way decisions are made realizes that presidents make the big decisions, or they should, and in most cases they do. So we used the framework of each presidency to figure out how the legacy of Vietnam is interpreted by each one.

Patricia Ellis: A couple of policy questions and then we'll go to the audience—one, and this is also about history. There were many lessons from losses like the Russians and the British in Afghanistan and the French in Algeria and Vietnam—how much attention do you think US presidents and policy leaders paid to these lessons and experiences of the past?

Marvin Kalb: Well, it's on two levels—on one level of course they knew about the French experience and they knew about the Russians and the Brits in Afghanistan, but one thing to know is that flows into an almost hypothetical, theoretical framework. Presidents have to deal with concrete decisions that affect lives, and they have to make those decisions on the basis of their vision of Vietnam, and one of the reasons I'm particularly pleased with Debbie's contribution is that in each one of the chapters she

gives you insight into what each president was thinking, both politically and the way Vietnam fit into that—and you have to remember that, with [President] Clinton for example, who danced through hoops to avoid military service—Hillary Clinton wrote in her quite big and wonderful book that Bill would have been happy to fight in World War II, but not in Vietnam. In other words, there are certain wars that an American citizen has the right not to fight in and others that you arrogate to yourself that you have a right to fight in. So if you're dealing with that, you get a sense of what is in the mind of each one of these presidents based on his experience with Vietnam.

Patricia Ellis: As we get farther and farther away from Vietnam, do you think there could be a book in the future called “The Haunting Legacy of Afghanistan” and having this replace Vietnam as the frame of reference?

Marvin Kalb: I can imagine that being discussed, but not in a real way, because what has happened in the last 30 plus years, 36 years now since the end of the Vietnam war, is that just as Obama hated when Holbrooke would raise Vietnam, he didn't mind it if you raised the lessons of Vietnam. He just didn't want you to say Vietnam because it has such an unappealing quality. Lyndon Johnson spoke of Vietnam as a “raggedy-ass little fourth-rate country,” and yet that raggedy-ass little fourth-rate country beat the United States of America, a great nuclear power. How could that happen? That answer has been provided by Stan Karnow—but with us, it's the legacy that keeps going—you don't have to say Vietnam you just have to say, we're not going to get involved, we need an exit strategy, we're going to do this the way we want to do—so the legacy of Vietnam is now, as we say somewhere in the book, is now in the DNA of presidential decision-making. It is simply there.

Patricia Ellis: Let's open it up to other questions. We'll take a few at a time.

Question: I'm Marcia Wiss, and my late husband, Don McDonald, as Marvin knows, was the USAID Mission Director in Vietnam for four years during the war. Regrettably, I have not read the book yet, but certainly one of the stories in addition to the political aspect is the economic aspect, the development aspect. Don was asked to write a book about why there was success in development during the time of the war and it was mixed up with the whole “hearts and minds” issue, which has sort of a negative connotation but the idea was to increase life expectancy during a war, increase education during a war, and all the things we think of when we think about development. I know people talk about the issues of development in Iraq and Afghanistan. It's obviously different in the context of Vietnam where we lost but we were pretty successful during the war and got erased afterward. It seems there are probably lost lessons there that were successes that we've not learned in either of the other two, would you agree?

Marvin Kalb: That's an interesting phraseology to the lost lessons of Vietnam.

Question: I'm Anne-Lise Cattin Hennin from the Embassy of Switzerland, and I look forward to reading the book and thank you for speaking to us tonight. My question is regarding Afghanistan, going a bit further, what is a decent way for the US to exit Afghanistan, what needs to happen or not happen so that the US and the world can accept that the US did not lose in Afghanistan?

Question: Hi, Marina McCarthy—with regard to Reagan doing nothing in response to the 1983 attacks in Lebanon, how long until we invaded Grenada did it take to direct the public consciousness into forgetting those medical students?

Marvin Kalb: The point on the development question—we didn't write a book about the Vietnam War so bear that in mind, it's about the legacy. But let's jump ahead to Afghanistan because there is a very serious effort being made now similar to what Don was involved in many years ago and that is to win the hearts and minds of people, on an assumption that if you did win the hearts and minds, you wouldn't have to fight them. There is a tremendous amount of money being spent on that. The non-military aspects of Afghanistan have increased phenomenally. At the end of the day, it's who controls

the guns and the street corners or who's hiding in different parts of a building, controlling a road. The people who control a road or the guns are the people who are going to end up winning. And you can have as existed in Afghanistan, many, many new schools—women and young girls are going to school for the first time ever—it's a phenomenal growth and I think it's marvelous, IF we can control the military. Petraeus, who is a brilliant general, believed you operate on two fronts in Afghanistan. He wanted, he said, to bloody them, to really bloody them bad, inflict huge casualties so they won't oppose you as much as they would normally, and you can go ahead and build the schools and all of the other stuff, which is essential for building a new society. So two questions come up—can we at this point in Afghanistan build a new society and two, can we at the end of the day control the guy who has the gun guarding the road in some little village somewhere? And at the moment, my judgment would have to be that we're not doing very well in that respect.

Deborah Kalb: So I will start with the third question, then the second and then let my father fill in the rest—the question about the Grenada invasion, it was actually the same weekend as the bombing in Beirut, and so it really did take people's attention away from what happened in Beirut and the death of the 241 Marines. President Reagan was actually in Georgia that weekend playing golf and it was two mornings in a row that he was woken up in the middle of the night with huge news developments, one was Grenada and one was Beirut, and so it unfolded simultaneously. So the public's attention really was focused on victory in Grenada—people had obviously heard what happened in Beirut with the Marines but because of Grenada going on at that exact same time, it was sort of a mitigating factor and people focusing on that and then it was not until several months later that Reagan opted to just pull the Marines out of Beirut entirely.

The question about what is considered “good enough,” it gets to our last chapter of the book which is a wonderful question if people are debating that on a continuing basis. I'm not sure we have an answer for what would constitute something being “good enough” but I think that what we do talk about in the last chapter of the book really deals with President Obama's struggle to define that and to come up with a strategy that would be seen as successful enough on his way out. So he comes in, sends more troops in, and then he has to figure out how to gracefully get them out without being perceived as either going too quickly in getting them out or too slowly. So presidents tend to opt for a middle course, especially presidents who are up for re-election and need to get people to approve of what they're doing. So he took a pretty much middle ground and he gets criticisms from both sides that way, but he didn't go to one extreme or the other in terms of saying, okay, we're bringing most of them out immediately, or saying, we're keeping them all in. Some of his military people would have wanted him to say we're keeping them in longer to do one more fighting season, so he opted for the middle ground, and I think they have not actually defined what would be the right way to get out. I think it's more about judging the realities as they go along, and you know, this is a president who came in saying that Afghanistan was the war of necessity and that Iraq was part of George W. Bush, but Afghanistan is what we're going to focus on and that's the one we have to do well on, so he boxed himself in a sense, but I'll let my father add to that.

Marvin Kalb: And not even do well, he said specifically during the campaign, “the war we have to win.” Now we never defined win, but he did use that word and he used it over and over again because Obama had no military experience when he came into office. There was a lot of criticism during the campaign and I remember it now as I think back to those times, that in a choice between Hillary Clinton and Obama to get the Democratic nomination, with Hillary there was experience. She didn't run a good campaign otherwise she would have been our president now—she ran a terrible campaign as a matter of fact. He ran a very good campaign and so he slipped in, but he slipped in with no experience on the military side and very little experience on governing. So we all know, either as Americans or people living in this city, we live with the consequences of that. And the key for him is not to appear as a loser. Every president wants to appear victorious, but turn that around—you want to appear victorious but that he can't have. So you turn that around and the idea is that so long as it looks as if you didn't lose, because he is terrified by the Richard Nixon “who lost China” thing and its very much in his mind. If he were in office when the Taliban re-conquer Afghanistan, he lost it, it's his war, it's no longer George W.

Bush's war, and then he will be saddled with that, but not just him but the Democratic Party will be saddled with that. He doesn't want that. The Democratic Party doesn't want that kind of thing. But he's stuck with it and because he's stuck, we're stuck, and he's the president.

Gail Leftwich Kitch: You touched on General Petraeus, which I wanted to ask about, but also on Obama's lack of military background—I wondered if you explore in the book one of the lessons learned about the relationship between the military and the civilian leadership and it strikes me that one thing that has been written about already about Obama is that there's been a kind of deference that he paid to the military that is obviously part of his lack of a background, and also I think a generational issue, kind of like he doesn't know what to do with the military. So then what do you do with that? So it's a big deal plus he had General Petraeus who's larger than life—your comment about him being a brilliant general—he puts on his pants the same way as everyone else but nobody actually believes that, so I think that whole phenomenon is an issue. W., on the other hand, was enthralled to the military so you have these two folks who sort of represent two sides of the coin for a similar reason, so I wanted to hear what you have to say about that and the lesson of Vietnam regarding that civilian-military relationship.

Ann McLaughlin Korologos: I actually had nearly the very same question—do you see Petraeus as yet another generation of generals who are reacting to Vietnam? This guy is saying he learned the lesson, he's studied it and is a scholar of it, and said I'm going to do the counterinsurgency program that nobody could execute, they couldn't do it 40 years ago, but I'm going to do it. So yet again we have this thing and Obama may be too young to realize that it ain't going to work.

Marvin Kalb: Well, I think he realizes it, but the question is...

Question: I'm Nina Serafino with the Congressional Research Service—every military officer in the Vietnam generation that I've ever talked to thought the military won the war and that it was only a matter of public opinion which forced a pull-out that left us looking like we lost the war, so on the battlefield they say we won but we lost the public opinion battle so we pulled out. So I'm wondering how that plays into the whole thought of the legacy.

Question: Hi I'm Jerry Hagstrom—first, I'm surprised that we went straight from Vietnam to Afghanistan without mentioning Iraq and so I'm wondering what the lessons for Iraq are, and second you were talking about Obama not wanting to be a loser but does he get credit for the finding of Osama bin Laden?

Deborah Kalb: Those are all really great questions. I think that throughout the book we do talk a lot about the relationships between the presidents and the military, which in part deals with each president's biography and whether or not he served in the military, which most of the earlier presidents did and the later ones mostly didn't or didn't serve in the active military. I think that when you talk about President Obama you made some excellent points. I think that General Petraeus looms larger than life, I think many of Obama's advisors were convinced that Petraeus would run against him and that was a big issue too, it was something they were very concerned about. When Obama came in, he had General Jones come in as his National Security Adviser. People in the interviews told us that he put up this big, tall General Jones as a way of saying—he was there as sort of a counterbalance to Petraeus so they could say well, okay, we have this General right here in the White House working with me, and so yes, Obama came in with no military background and that did play a large role in the dynamics there. In one of the Obama chapters we did talk about two different books that were being read that dealt with Vietnam at the White House and at the Pentagon and it also shows the different mentality. The White House was reading "Lessons and Disasters" by Gordon Goldstein and looking at McGeorge Bundy and Vietnam and all the problems that came up in Vietnam, and at the Pentagon they were reading a book that dealt more with how different generals approached it in different ways and how actually it gets to the point of how many military people will say, "well we didn't really lose," and when we go to speak to different audiences and we have people in the audience who served in Vietnam, they

get very upset when it becomes the idea of lost war, they do not want it to be categorized that way and they say, look it was more of a question of the way those particular people dealt with it and the media of course played a big role and I think that plays out throughout the book but yes, definitely in the Obama chapter.

Marvin Kalb: Well I just want to stress how fixated Obama's political advisors were with Petraeus, and it wasn't an accident, as the Russians used to say, it wasn't an accident that Petraeus was selected to go to Afghanistan. It's not an accident that Petraeus is now at the CIA—this group of Democratic pols believes very strongly that he had to be edged out and put in a position where it would be literally unpatriotic for him to accept what were repeatedly Republican efforts to get him to think politics. But Jim Jones told us at a Starbucks one day that he did not believe for one instant that Petraeus would have a gone a political route that he was a soldier and he does what the President wants him to do, he's a great patriot and he's not going to go into politics. But Petraeus at the same time is one of those generals who represent a whole new breed of American military officers. Petraeus gets a PhD from Princeton and what is his thesis about? The lessons of Vietnam. When I asked him about how the lessons of Vietnam were affecting his policies when he was in Afghanistan—he was still in Afghanistan at the time—he said, "I don't want to answer that question." He pulled back because he didn't want to get too deeply involved because things he was doing in Afghanistan he had written were no-no's in his book. And it's an interesting story, by the way, to go back and look at the thesis and then look at what Petraeus did.

In terms of the question about Bush II and Iraq, when George W. came into office, and I have to pick up again on a point that Debbie made earlier—it's a remarkable thing that a presidential candidate who served his country in Vietnam loses presidential elections because Vietnam is like a black shadow hanging over the nation and you don't want to become associated with that because that's a loss. You want to become associated with victory, obviously. So when Bush II came into office, one of things that his people were saying is ABC—Anything But Clinton—and they used to make fun of Clinton in a very disparaging way saying that what Clinton did was shoot a couple of rockets into Afghanistan but then pulled back, or sent a couple of planes to bomb a couple of factories in Sudan but then pulled away because they said it made fun of the idea that he was a wimp, that he was not muscular, that he was not strong. And so when 9/11 happened, Cheney told us that that changed everything. Bush never had in mind to be a war president, he had in mind to be a happy guy and do what he wanted to do, but then he got stuck with 9/11 and Bush and Cheney were very proud of the fact that the US never suffered a second 9/11-type attack and Bush wanted what he called "boots on the ground" immediately. Clinton shied away from any military option that involved boots on the ground. The Kosovo problem came up, he stayed at 38,000 feet and bombed away for 78 days—what would have happened on the 79th who knows, but he would have had to do something involving boots on the ground but Milosevic caved. When Bush II came in, he took exactly the opposite approach. He wanted American boots on the ground as quickly as they could get there and you go for victory—you don't mess around with the United States—that was the Powell Doctrine in spades—don't mess with us and if you do, we're going to beat you, and beat you bad, and that's what he wanted to demonstrate to the world.

Richard Nixon always used to say that if we lost in Vietnam, we would look like a paper tiger, and Bush II was terrified that after 9/11 the US would be seen as a paper tiger, and so he wanted boots on the ground, and he wanted a dramatic, fast victory. And that's what he got in Afghanistan, it happened within six weeks, and we working with the Northern Alliance destroyed the Taliban. What we didn't do was finish the job.

Question: So finish the job—what would that be?

Marvin Kalb: Finishing the job at the time would have been finding Osama bin Laden and wiping out the al Qaeda connection because they were in Tora Bora, they were right at the edge of Pakistan and they were very vulnerable then.

Question: While you're on that, explain why they didn't.

Marvin Kalb: They didn't do it because they blew it—because Bush and Cheney also had a big role in this thing. Cheney felt that since we had already won, the Taliban was gone. We didn't have the foresight to understand that we were still left with all of the problems of Afghanistan, we then owned—that's the military jargon—we then owned Afghanistan and we owned all of the problems associated with it. And since we had beaten the Taliban, and because Osama bin Laden was on the run, we didn't deem it that necessary and that was a huge blunder.

Patricia Ellis: This has been absolutely fascinating. I want to thank Marvin and Debbie—we could go on for hours about this topic and you can really continue the conversation over the book signing so I would recommend you get a book and they would be happy to answer additional questions. Thanks a lot. *[Applause.]*