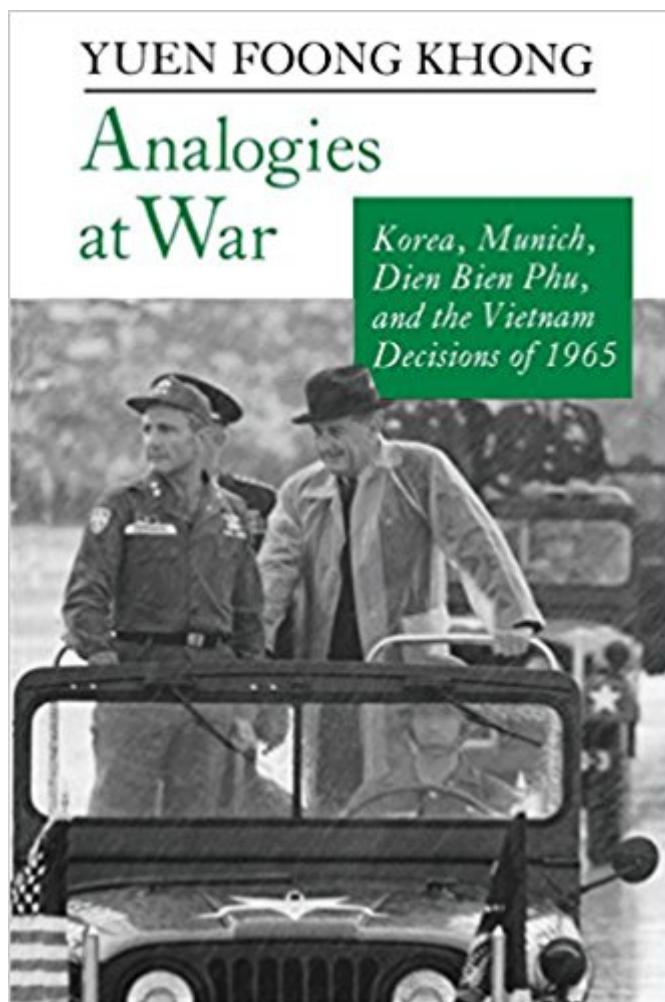


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Analogy At War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, And The Vietnam Decisions Of 1965



Synopsis

From World War I to Operation Desert Storm, American policymakers have repeatedly invoked the "lessons of history" as they contemplated taking their nation to war. Do these historical analogies actually shape policy, or are they primarily tools of political justification? Yuen Foong Khong argues that leaders use analogies not merely to justify policies but also to perform specific cognitive and information-processing tasks essential to political decision-making. Khong identifies what these tasks are and shows how they can be used to explain the U.S. decision to intervene in Vietnam. Relying on interviews with senior officials and on recently declassified documents, the author demonstrates with a precision not attained by previous studies that the three most important analogies of the Vietnam era--Korea, Munich, and Dien Bien Phu--can account for America's Vietnam choices. A special contribution is the author's use of cognitive social psychology to support his argument about how humans analogize and to explain why policymakers often use analogies poorly.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 1993"Khong's interviews and newly declassified documents make a compelling case the American decision-makers in 1965 used historical analogies not only to justify decisions but to make them, most notably in the process of rejecting options."--Foreign Affairs

One the best Theory development books I have. This book is most recommended for students of

Qualitative Research methods, to learn how to develop a comparative case study method and of course - how to project from history to current events

great

This is a groundbreaking book in the debate over political decision-makers' use of historical analogies. Khong's thesis states that policymakers do not merely use convenient historical analogies to justify their actions but perform specific cognitive and information processing tasks using the most vivid analogies without even realizing it. The book's focus is on the Johnson administration's decision to intervene in Vietnam using analogies from Munich, Korea, and Dien Bien Phu as historical guides. Khong asserts that the decision to intervene in Vietnam was the inevitable outgrowth of the assumptions of the day: containment, the domino theory, etc., and therefore was not a hypocritical use of analogies to justify aggression. Policymakers, like all humans, transform selected aspects of historical events into schema which influences all decisions. Because it is subconscious, historical events are seldom probed for accuracy. In my own research, I see analogies to Neville Chamberlain's disastrous pact with Hitler in Munich, 1938 used to justify all kinds of actions. This work is very useful and should be thoroughly internalized by decision-makers and those who work for them. In its framework, it is more "explicitly psychological" than other similar works. I assess Khong's work to be "analogous" (no pun intended) to the lessons of the Iraq War, fought years after this book's publication. For now, at least, the result of the Iraq War, like Vietnam, is so bereft of consensus that no clear-cut analogies can be made.

This book taking the political psychology approach analyse the events that led President Johnson to escalate U.S. involvement during the Vietnam War. Using "cold cognition -analogical reasoning", Khong explains with precision the decision-making process, why President Johnson increased U.S. participation in the Vietnam War but also the form it took during the few months in 1965. In terms of methodology, Khong make good use of interviews with participants of the decision-making process, in particular, George Ball and also memoirs of former statesmen for his analysis. The strength of the book lies in explaining how the option to escalate the war in Vietnam was arrived; through analogical reasoning by various participants of the decision-making process. Secondly, the form it took: the "slow squeeze" or incrementalism based on the last "lesson of history" of U.S. involvement

in Korea. In short, Khong utilising the process tracing method, clearly links the decision-making process to the implementation/outcome of U.S. foreign policy. The weakness of the book is not that it does not consider other views why the U.S. was drawn into the Vietnam owing to "containment", "domino-theory" and U.S. credibility. Rather the author misses out on possible "reconciliation" between the analogical reasoning approach with that of the U.S. national interest approach. Nevertheless, a must read for those interested in other approaches to explain why U.S. escalated its involvement in Vietnam apart from the "realist" paradigm and those interested in decision-making processes!

Khong clearly and succinctly details the role of lessons from history, especially the 1930s, in the decision to escalate the war in Vietnam. His analysis is thorough, relying on archival research. In approach, it is similar to my Rolling the Iron Dice, which analyzes the use of historical analogies by British and American decision makers during four crises in the 1950s: Korea, Iran (1951-3), Suez and Lebanon-Jordan (1958). Both analyze the role of lessons from history, although my work also shows the types of leaders and situations, in which historical analogies are used. Rolling the Iron Dice: Historical Analogies and Decisions to Use Military Force in Regional Contingencies (Contributions in Military Studies)

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