

# Presidential Decision Making And Blame Avoidance In Vietnam And Iraq

The decision-making process of presidents in times of war is a critical aspect of their leadership. Two prominent examples are the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, both of which had significant impacts on American history. In this article, we will explore how presidents made decisions related to these conflicts and how they attempted to avoid taking blame for the negative outcomes.

## Presidential Decision Making in Vietnam

The Vietnam War, which lasted from 1955 to 1975, saw the involvement of multiple administrations, each grappling with the complexities of the conflict. President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to escalate American involvement in Vietnam was a pivotal moment. Despite advisors warning against it, Johnson decided to increase troop levels, eventually committing over 500,000 American soldiers to the war.

Johnson's decision-making process was heavily influenced by the fear of being blamed for the "loss" of Vietnam. He sought to avoid the appearance of weakness and to maintain public trust in his leadership. However, as the war dragged on without clear progress, public opinion turned against the war effort, and Johnson faced intense criticism.

## Pandora's Trap: Presidential Decision Making and Blame Avoidance in Vietnam and Iraq

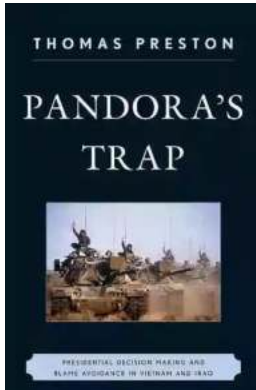
by Thomas Preston (Kindle Edition)

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Blame avoidance strategies employed by Johnson included shifting blame onto the military and his advisors. He often presented decisions as being based on their recommendations, thereby reducing personal responsibility. Furthermore, he sought to manipulate the media narrative by controlling information flow, suppressing dissenting voices, and presenting a more positive image of the war effort to the public.

## **Presidential Decision Making in Iraq**

The Iraq War, which began in 2003 and lasted until 2011, saw President George W. Bush as the primary decision-maker. The decision to invade Iraq was based on intelligence suggesting the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). However, after the invasion, it became clear that the intelligence was flawed, and no substantial WMDs were found.

Bush's decision-making process in Iraq was influenced by various factors, including the desire to respond to the 9/11 attacks, concerns about national security, and the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. However, as the war became increasingly unpopular and the absence of WMDs was revealed, Bush faced considerable criticism and blame.

Blame avoidance strategies employed by Bush included emphasizing the intelligence he received, deflecting blame onto his advisors, and framing the war as a necessary step for national security. Additionally, his administration sought to control the media narrative, shape public opinion, and downplay the negative consequences of the war.

## **Comparison of Decision Making and Blame Avoidance**

While there are similarities in the decision-making and blame avoidance strategies used by Presidents Johnson and Bush, there are also important differences. In Vietnam, Johnson appeared more openly involved in decision-making, whereas Bush relied on a closer circle of advisors. Both presidents sought to avoid personal blame, but Johnson seemed to bear more personal responsibility due to his direct involvement in escalating the conflict.

Additionally, Johnson's manipulation of the media narrative was more overt compared to Bush's administration, which relied more on shaping the public discourse through carefully orchestrated press briefings and public relations efforts.

## **Implications and Lessons Learned**

Studying the decision-making and blame avoidance strategies of presidents in times of war provides valuable insights into the complexities of leadership and the consequences of their choices. It highlights the challenges leaders face when making critical decisions that impact the lives of millions and the need to balance popular opinion, strategic considerations, and personal reputation.

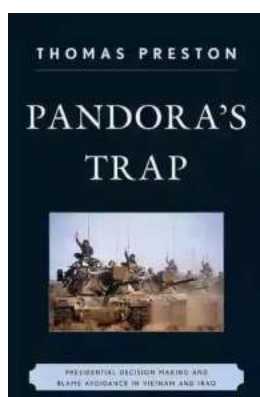
By understanding the strategies employed by past presidents, we can gain a better understanding of how these dynamics shape decision-making processes and their potential consequences. These lessons can inform future leaders facing

similar circumstances and help them navigate the complexities and potential pitfalls of decision-making in times of conflict.

The Vietnam War and the Iraq War were transformative moments in American history. Understanding the decision-making processes of presidents during these conflicts and their efforts to avoid blame provides valuable insights into the complexities of leadership and governance.

Presidents Johnson and Bush employed various strategies to deflect blame, manipulate public opinion, and control the media narrative. While their approaches differed, the underlying objectives were similar – to protect their legitimacy, reputation, and political standing.

Studying historical examples of decision-making and blame avoidance can aid in evaluating the success and effectiveness of leaders in managing complex situations. Learning from the past can help shape future approaches to decision-making and accountability, ultimately leading to better outcomes for all.



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How important is presidential personality and leadership style in foreign policy decisions? To answer this question, Thomas Preston takes readers inside the Bush administration's decision-making process and use of intelligence to better understand how administration officials justified the Iraq War—and how they sought to avoid blame for the consequences of their actions. Based on extensive interviews with key Bush administration officials, Preston offers students of American foreign policy, presidential decision making, the dynamics of blame avoidance, and future practitioners with an in depth examination of how presidential personality and leadership style impacted Bush's central foreign policy failure. In addition, Preston looks critically at the oft-cited comparisons of Iraq to Lyndon Johnson's leadership during the Vietnam War, exploring where the analogy fits and a number of important differences. He shows how both presidents' styles exacerbated their managerial weaknesses in these cases and the limits of blame avoidance strategies. Importantly, the book provides a cautionary tale for future leaders to consider more carefully the long-term consequences of satisfying their short term policy desires by lifting the lid to any new Pandora's trap.



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