



George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment

David L. DiLeo

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During his tenure as undersecretary of state from 1961 to 1966, George Ball was the only presidential adviser who systematically opposed American military intervention in Southeast Asia. In *George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment* David DiLeo profiles Ball's opposition to the United States' role in Vietnam and evaluates the impact of this dissent on the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations.

At the height of the Cold War, Ball questioned the validity of the domino theory and was virtually alone in challenging the idea that containment was an attainable or even desirable goal of American foreign policy. He asserted that the nation's foreign policy must respect material as well as moral limitations, and he was skeptical of the use of military power as a political instrument. American intervention in Vietnam, he believed, was the inevitable and tragic consequence of the uncritical globalism that had marked the thinking of policymakers since World War II.

DiLeo analyzes Ball's contention that Presidents Kennedy and Johnson exaggerated the global significance of the Vietnam conflict by perceiving it as a struggle of the Free World against a monolithic communism. He examines Ball's repeated warnings about the futility of strategic bombing and his sobering assertions about the possibility of Chinese and Soviet intervention, assesses the influence of his bold declarations that the United States would be defeated, and traces his frustrated quest to find another advisor within the Johnson administration to confirm these judgments.

Proving a comprehensive picture of Ball's actions and motivations, DiLeo draws upon personal papers of key participants in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Ball's office telephone transcripts and personal archive, National Security Council memorandums, and more than forty personal interviews. The result is a fascinating book that illuminates why Ball is generally recognized as one of the most original and insightful strategists of the past quarter-century.

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