

This excellent report has been professionally converted for accurate flowing-text e-book format reproduction. The intellectual starting point for his essay is that the normal human predilection is to reason by historical analogy, and that, in his words, such reasoning has played a significant role in the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy since the end of World War II. Records essay examines the downside of over-reliance on reasoning by historical analogy, focusing on perhaps the two most influential analogies, the Munich Conference of 1938 and the Vietnam War. As Record makes clear, each of these events shaped how several generations viewed and continue to view international politics and the responsibilities of the United States. Record warns that careless reasoning by historical analogy can have disastrous consequences for American foreign policy. The perceived lessons of Munich underpinned US intervention in Vietnam. Will the Cold Wars necessity and experience of containing the Soviet Union come to be seen as applicable to emerging Chinese power? Chapter I * Introduction * Chapter II * What Happened at Munich and in Vietnam, and What Lessons Did They Present? * Chapter III * How Have Munich and Vietnam Influenced National Security Policy? * Chapter IV * Have Munich and Vietnam Usefully Informed Policy? * Chapter V * Does Reasoning by Historical Analogy Help or Hinder? * Notes Reasoning by historical analogy has played a significant role in the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy since the end of World War II, especially on matters involving consideration or actual use of force. States, like individuals, make decisions based at least in part on past experience, or, more specifically, what they believe past experience teaches. But reasoning by historical analogy can be dangerous, especially if such reasoning is untempered by recognition that no two historical events are identical and that the future is more than a linear extension of the past. The instructiveness of historical events tends to diminish the greater their distance in time and space from the day and place they occurred. To be sure, historical analogies can helpfully inform policy. Many policy-makers, however, are historically illiterate, and most that are well read make policy decisions, just like their untutored brethren, primarily on the basis of considerations having nothing to do with the perceived lessons of past experience. For example, the Johnson administrations very reluctant decision to fight in Vietnam was driven as much by perceived domestic political imperatives (notably fear that abandoning South Vietnam would provoke a presidency-destroying soft-on-communism political backlash) as by any other factor.

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