

Vietnam war lost in U.S.

Ten years ago, North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon. It was fitting and ironic that the final act of the 30-year Vietnam war was staged by mechanized North Vietnamese regulars and not by pyjama-clad guerrillas.

For, in reality, the struggle was a conventional war between American and South Vietnamese troops, on one hand, and the Soviet-armed North Vietnamese Army, on the other. In the end, the North won by throwing 10 army divisions, with T-54 tanks and 130-mm guns, against the South, a classic conventional campaign.

Yet to this day, most North Americans still believe that the Vietnam war was won by communist Viet Cong guerrillas. These guerrillas did play an important role in the first half of the war, both against the French and later against the South Vietnamese and Americans. But, we should recall, most of the Viet Cong were killed during the famous 1968 Tet Offensive and their guerrilla apparatus destroyed.

Tet may have been a great military victory for the U.S. and South Vietnamese, but, in the end, it proved the turning point of the war and a triumph for the communists. Why? Because the U.S. media observed the terrible battles of Tet and, in its ignorance and bias, convinced the American public that Tet was a defeat.

Two men, above all, were responsible for this psychological defeat: Walter Cronkite and Robert McNamara, then secretary of defence. Lovable, avuncular Cronkite has a face and voice that demand trust; he looks like everyone's father-figure. Cronkite's words, his gestures and frowns, his massive TV ratings made him one of the key elements in the Vietnam war.

And Cronkite, acting as point man for his fellow media liberals, missed no chance to convince the public that the war was lost. So when Tet came, Cronkite and his fellows at ABC and NBC used the

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myopic eye of TV to turn a great victory into a defeat. It was as if Cronkite had filmed the carnage of Stalingrad and convinced the Russian public that the war was lost.

The battle of Tet marked the war's turning point: From there, public opinion relentlessly turned against it. When a cowardly Congress finally abandoned South Vietnam by cutting off most of its aid, the North Vietnamese launched their Soviet-supplied army southward. Their victory was as much a result of Cronkite's biased reporting as Gen. Giap's strategy.

Equally responsible for America's first military defeat was McNamara, secretary of defence under presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Billed by the press as a genius, McNamara turned out to be a walking disaster, a man whose every major decision proved a catastrophe for the United States.

It was McNamara who counselled Kennedy not to take firm action against Cuba, thus creating the Bay of Pigs fiasco and a Soviet military bastion 90 miles off Florida. And it was the same darling of the liberals who developed the concept of MAD — mutually assured destruction.

When McNamara came into office, the U.S. had a 10-to-one nuclear superiority over the USSR. He convinced Kennedy and Johnson to allow the Soviets to catch up, claiming that once Moscow felt "secure" it would stop building arms and become friendly. Instead, the Soviets surged ahead of the U.S. and we live today under the threat of nuclear destruction because of the idiocy of McNamara.

Not content with throwing away his nation's security, McNamara was the chief architect of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Headless of military advice, McNamara developed the policy of "gradual response," the slow escalation of pressure against North Vietnam. He refused to listen to the Pentagon's call for ending the war by striking decisively at its source, North Vietnam.

Instead, McNamara threw away American money, power and lives — 58,000 in all — by waging limited war without any strategy or sense of reality. Thanks to McNamara, American soldiers were fed piecemeal into the cauldron of Vietnam; American power was frittered away, restricted from dealing the North a knockout blow, rendered futile. Johnson, preoccupied with his social welfare schemes, let McNamara create a disaster.

Now, 10 years later, it is worth recalling how McNamara lost the war in Vietnam and Cronkite and the media lost it at home. McNamara is still around, preaching liberalism, consistent only in being wrong about everything, a fool in fool's clothing. Cronkite still occasionally speaks. His message is the same. He, and the other media people who helped lose the war, are dispensing wisdom today about Central America.

Punch



"Here's to soft lights, dreamy music and another go at your tuna noodle casserole."