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Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

Clarke: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with author Max Boot discussing his book *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam*. I'm your host Ken Clarke, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and it's sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. On May 7, 1954, the French military surrendered their garrison at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam, prompting the country's partisan into North Vietnam and South Vietnam. During this transition period, CIA operative Edward Lansdale achieved his greatest renown as a diplomat and policy maker. He ran a covert intelligence operation, sending sabotage teams to North Vietnam, helped facilitate the flow of refugees from north to south, and served as the closest advisor to President Ngo Dinh Diem, the leader of South Vietnam. Yet what makes Lansdale truly unique was his belief that the key to defeating communism across the world was not simply opposing its spread, but offering another more appealing ideology in its place. Lansdale pioneered this Hearts and Minds diplomacy, which emphasized the needs of the people where they lived, first in the Philippines and then in Vietnam. In his book *The Road Not Taken*, Max Boot argues that this revolutionary policy was ultimately crushed by America's giant military bureaucracy, steered by generals and diplomats who favored true buildups and military operations over winning the trust of people abroad. Drawing from a wealth of official and personal document, Boot chronicles the life and times of Lansdale and reframes our understating of the Vietnam War, suggesting the war could have been different had policy makers listened to Lansdale's vision. With reverberations that continue to resonate in Iraq and Afghanistan, *The Road Not Taken* is a biography of a historical consequence. Max Boot is a military historian and foreign policy analyst. He is the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City. Boot is the author of three previous books, including *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*; *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*; and *War Made New: Weapons, Warriors, and the Making of the Modern World*. He is also a contributing editor to the Los Angeles Times and a regular contributor to the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and other publications. Please join me in welcoming back to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Max Boot.

(Applause)

Boot: It's great to be back here at the Pritzker Library and a delight to talk about my new book *The Road Not Taken*, and about Edward Lansdale, who was certainly one of the most unusual general officers in the history of the United States air force or really any other military service as well. He is somebody who has been a figure of legend. He was said to be the model for the Quiet American and the Ugly American. He has been written about by every major nonfiction on the subject of the Vietnam war, sometimes in terms laudatory and other times not so laudatory. If you go online you'll even see a burgeoning conspiracy theory about General Lansdale having been the supposed mastermind of the John F. Kennedy assassination based entirely on this one piece of evidence which shows somebody from the back in Dallas on November 22, 1963. And if you believe the conspiracy mongers, that would be Ed Lansdale, and he was there to orchestrate the killing of a president. That would seem like a rather thin reed on which to hang a charge

of murdering John F. Kennedy, but that was actually a basis of the movie JFK from Oliver Stone. So there is certainly a lot of mythology out there about General Lansdale. And I would quote to you the words of one of his bureaucratic rivals in the Pentagon in the early 1960s, Brute Krulak of the marine corps, who said, "There are few individuals in my knowledge more damned at the same time applauded. History's going to have to portray Lansdale's real part." Well, that's where I come in. I am the voice of history in this discussion, having spent the last five years of my life devoted to studying Ed Lansdale's life. And what I would like to do very briefly today is present an overview of some of my findings about the real Edward Lansdale, the man behind the myth--the man behind the legend. Who was Ed Lansdale? Well, for starters he was a middle-class kid. He was not to the manner born like so many of the makers of US foreign policy in the post-WWII era. He did not go to an ivy-league school. He did not work on Wall Street. He was actually born in Detroit in 1908. There he is with his family in the middle of the picture, with his father Harry who was an automotive executive in the early days of the automobile industry, and so, many of his employers went bust while he was still working for them. They had a very up-and-down existence. Although born in Detroit, Ed Lansdale spent most of his childhood in LA and California, and he became kind of a quintessential Californian. He was very laid back, very mellow. He did not like wearing neckties, and so I'm not wearing a necktie in his honor today. He was kind of a proto-silicon valley guy decades before the formation of Silicon Valley. A couple other points worth mentioning very briefly about his upbringing. One is that although he was not a great student, and his life should certainly give hope to C-students everywhere, he was a great reader, and he loved reading about the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and America's founding. And those documents became his loadstars as an agent of American power in Asia. Other point worth bringing up very quickly is he grew up in a time of virulent racism, especially against Asian Americans in California in the nineteen-teens and twenties, and that was not a sentiment that Ed Lansdale ever shared. He always had great empathy for minorities and outsiders, and partly because he was a minority of sorts himself. Even though he was a white, middle class American, he was also a Christian Scientist, and his family part of a very small religious group that was looked down upon in his day. So for whatever reason he always had empathy for minorities, and that would also be a crucial ingredient for his success in Asia because he would not look down upon the people he was meeting there. He would not condescend to them, unlike so many westerners of the day. Now, Ed Lansdale went to UCLA. He dropped out shy of graduation, and in the early 1930s he moved to New York hoping to become a New Yorker writer or cartoonist. He did not quite make it, and like so many people with creative aspirations, he wound up in advertising. And this is a picture of Ed Lansdale in his Mad Men days working at an ad agency in San Francisco circa 1940. Along came December 7, 1941, the day that will live in infamy. And his life, like the life of the entire country, was turned upside down. He wanted to get into the fight but had trouble enlisting because he was overage and had some medical issues. And so instead of joining the army right away, he joined the OSS, America's first civilian intelligence agency. Lansdale spent the WWII years stateside interviewing travelers about these strange and wondrous places where the Americans would shortly be landing, from North Africa to the islands of the Pacific. And in the course of doing that he showed himself to be a good listener, somebody who was very skilled at eliciting information from people. This by the way is one of the ads that he appeared in--or one of the ads that he produced and also appeared in. By the fall of 1945, as millions of American GIs were coming home, and WWII was ending, Ed Lansdale shipped abroad on his first permanent overseas assignment to the Philippines. And this is a picture of him in the middle of the screen on this very leaky rice boat that he took to survey some of the

newly liberated islands of Japan. He was fascinated by everything that he saw about him, whether in the Philippines or in Japan. He wanted to learn as much about Filipino society, in particular, as he could--about their culture, about their folklore, about their music, about their economic conditions. Everything that he could possibly figure out. He was especially fascinated by the Huk rebellion--the Hukbalahap, this communist insurgency that arose to of the ruins of WWII. And this is Lansdale in the middle of the screen there with some captured Huks in front of him. By the time that Lansdale went to the Philippines in 1945, he was already married. He had married in 1933 to this woman, Helen, who was a small-town girl from upstate New York. They had a couple of kids-- Ted and Pete--but when he went to the Philippines, he met this woman, Pat Kelly, who was a very vivacious Filipino war widow. Her husband, who was of Irish Filipino ancestry, had died during the war, and she was working as a journalist raising her daughter, and later had a long career at the US information agency in Manila. And Pat Kelly was of interest to Ed Lansdale initially because she came from the same part of Luzon as many of the Huk leaders. She in fact went to high school with some of them, and so he enlisted her as a tour guide on these very dangerous forays into the backcountry of the Philippines. And in the course of these adventures, a friendship developed and before long a romance. Pat Kelly became the great love of Ed Lansdale's life, a fact that was not generally known before I began work on this book. And I was very lucky in the course of my research to run across this. These were the love letters that Ed Lansdale and Pat Kelly shared with one another over the course of many years. I actually tracked down pat Kelly's granddaughter, who lives in northern Virginia, and went over to her house, and she said, "Hey, would you be interested in these letters I have in my basement?" And I said, "Boy, would I." For a biographer this is like striking gold. I was very lucky to get these letters, and I was also lucky to get my hands, courtesy of Ed Lansdale's sons, Ted and Pete who are still very much around--they shared with me the letters that he had written to their mother Helen, often simultaneously with the letters that he was writing to his longtime mistress Pat Kelly. I'm actually the first person after Ed Lansdale himself to have seen both sets of letters. And so that gave me this unparalleled vantage point into Lansdale's innermost thinking that previous authors have simply not had. One of the things that jumped out at me right away was the extent to which Pat Kelly was important to Ed Lansdale, not only personally--although she was very important to him personally--but also professionally, because she is somebody who proved an entre into Filipino society in a way that's very hard for an outsider to penetrate. I also had a perspective on some of the more awkward episodes of Ed Lansdale's life; for example, what happened when in 1947-48, when Ed Lansdale's wife Helen and boys Ted and Pete came to live with him in Manila at the same time that he was still very much seeing Pat Kelly. And juggling these two women would test the ingenuity and would in fact be one of the greatest covert operations carried out-- (Laughter)

Boot: --by this future secret agent. He actually came clean with Helen and asked for a divorce, which she did not want to grant--at the time very hard to get a contested divorce, and so they stayed married. But for much of the next decade Ed Lansdale would spend his time in Asia while Helen returned home and raised the boys essentially by herself. Now this initial tour for Ed Lansdale in the Philippines from '45 to '48 was incredibly important because it set up his later success, beginning in 1950 at a very dark time in the history of the United States. This was right after the communists had taken power in China, right after the Soviet Union had tested the atomic bomb, right after North Korea had invaded South Korea embroiling America in the Vietnam War. Back home the Red Scare was the order of the day, and there was great concern that Luis Taruc, the leader of the Huks, was about to become the next Asian communist leader to take

power. The Pentagon talked about sending US Army troops to the Philippines to resist this, but all the troops were necessary for the Korean War, so there were no divisions to spare for the Philippines. And so instead of sending multiple army divisions, the decision was made by the CIA to send Ed Lansdale and a small covert action team to the Philippines to defeat the Huk rebellion. By this point Lansdale was an air force officer, but he was on loan to the CIA. And this is Lansdale in 1950 in his bungalow in Manila. This is Lansdale at the head of the table there. That's his good friend Robert Chaplin of the New Yorker, his eccentric deputy Charles Bohannon, former anthropologist, and some of the Filipinos with whom they were working. And this photo is very emblematic of the way that Lansdale liked to work. He did not like regimentation, he did not like protocol, he did not like formal committees. What he liked were these kinds of coffee clashes, where he could kick back with fellow American and Filipino associates and brainstorm the ideas that would defeat the Huk rebellion. Now the most important thing that Lansdale did in the Philippines was to cultivate this man. Ramon Magsaysay, who was then the newly appointed defense minister of the Philippines, a former guerilla leader against the Japanese, a bluff, charismatic, and honest political figure who wanted to do the right thing, wanted to defeat the Huk rebellion, but wasn't sure how, and Lansdale essentially became his one-man brain trust. They became very close. They toured the countryside together. They were even roommates for a while. They became as close as brothers. And together Ed Lansdale and Ramon Magsaysay, pioneered what we would today call population-centric counterinsurgency. Lansdale's essential insight was that the way to beat the Huks was by using less force rather than more. He told the Philippine army to stop bombarding barrios and killing a lot of innocent people and creating more enemies than they eliminated. He suggested that they needed to use less force to gain the trust of the people, to protect the people, and then to treat the people as brothers. And once the people came to trust the army, they would then rat out the insurgents in their midst. And this is the essential insight that is at the heart of counterinsurgency doctrine, a term that did not yet exist but that Lansdale pioneered in the 1950s. Now remember that Ed Lansdale also had an interest in advertising. And of course in the military version of advertising, which is psychological warfare. He also knew a lot about Filipino folklore, and he knew for example about the legend of the ahn seong, the vampires that were said to haunt the Philippine countryside. And so Ed Lansdale decided to mobilize the ahn seong against the Huks, and he did this by having a Philippine army unit take a dead Huk fighter and put a couple of puncture wounds in his neck. And then spread a rumor campaign that he had been killed by a vampire, to put the fear of the supernatural into the communist insurgents. And this became part of the Lansdale legend that CIA headquarters people would say, "Can you believe what this guy Lansdale is doing?" But I don't want to give you the impression that he defeated the Huk rebellion with these dirty tricks or psychological warfare. The way he did it was really politics 101, because the Huk slogan was "Bullets not ballots." And why bullets not ballots? Because people didn't trust the electoral process. It was all rigged by the feudal oligarchy that controlled the economic resources of the Philippines and control the political system as well. So Lansdale understood that the first thing he had to do was to instill popular confidence in the democratic process, which he did by mobilizing Filipino civic organizations to safeguard the balloting. But his masterpiece was Tamon Magsaysay's campaign for president of the Philippines in 1953. And Lansdale became his virtual campaign manager. And if any of you are interested in running a political campaign in the developing world, or even in the already-developed world, I would commend to you a stop-secret memorandum that Ed Lansdale wrote to his boss CIA director Allen Dulles, only recently declassified, that explains how he won the 1953 presidential election. And it wasn't anything particularly underhanded. It was really

politics 101. Doing things like, for example, coming up with a campaign slogan for Magsaysay--which in case you're interested was "Magsaysay is my guy". And so Magsaysay became known throughout the Philippines as the guy. And so with Lansdale's expert campaign management and Magsaysay's own reputation as an honest and fearless reformer, he won a landslide victory. And here he is being inaugurated as president of the Philippines in 1953, a triumph that earned Ed Lansdale a new nickname. He became known as Colonel Landslide. And what he achieved in the Philippines was one of the great unsung success stories of the Cold War from the American perspective, a communist insurgency defeated without risking a single American soldier in battle. And so when Lansdale returned home in 1954, he was as you imagine in great favor with his boss, CIA director Allen Dulles. And that became of considerable importance, because in 1954 was also the year when another crisis was brewing in another Southeast Asian country. That was the year of Dien Bien Phu, when the French were losing their empire in Indochina. And this was actually a photo that I took at this museum that's recently been put up in Dien Bien Phu, which if any of you happen to find yourselves in northern Vietnam, I would highly recommend it. A fascinating place to visit. But of course in 1954 this was not being looked upon as a historical curiosity. In Washington, it was seen as an imminent security threat because of the domino theory, this notion that if Indochina fell to the communists then pretty soon all of Asia would not be far behind. Now the Geneva conference, Vietnam was divided into two. You had North Vietnam, which would be ruled by Ho Chi Minh and the communists, and then South Vietnam, which was supposed to be noncommunist. But how do you create a noncommunist state where none had ever existed before? Nobody in Washington was quite sure, but when Allen Dulles the CIA director talked the problem over with his brother, secretary of state John Foster Dulles, they decided well, why don't we send Colonel Landslide over there and see what he can do? And so it was that in the summer of 1954 Ed Lansdale found himself in Saigon. His marching orders from Allen Dulles were quite literally, "Do what you did in the Philippines." And he did, remarkably enough. The first thing he did was to cultivate a new protégé. Just as he had cultivated Ramon Magsaysay in the Philippines, he cultivated Ngo Dinh Diem, the newly appointed prime minister of the state of South Vietnam. Diem was a Catholic Confucian Mandarin. He had previously been a minister under the French but had resigned in disgust, and so he had credentials as both an anti-communist as well as an anti-colonialist. But in the summer of 1954 very few people expected that Diem would last nine weeks in power, much less nine years. The fact that he succeeded in consolidating his authority owed a lot to the expert guidance that he received from Ed Lansdale. Now this was not as easy to do as it had been in the case of Ramon Magsaysay. This is Lansdale there; that's Diem over there. For one thing, there was a language barrier between them, because although Lansdale was very good at cultivating foreigners, he was kind of a typical American in that he only spoke English. Now this had not been a big issue in the Philippines where the elites spoke English. It was a much bigger issue in South Vietnam, where the elites spoke French or Vietnamese, and so Lansdale had to work through a translator. But even working through a translator, he established a very close relationship with Ngo Dinh Diem. Now how did he do it? Very, very simple: he listened rather than lectured. Now we Americans love to go to the developing world and tell people what to do. And that wasn't the Lansdale approach at all. He listened, and that in turn was not easy to do, because Diem was a notorious windbag. He would go on for hour after hour boring the pants off of most of his American interlocutors, but Lansdale was made of sterner stuff and probably had a stronger bladder because he would sit there for hour after hour listening to Diem drone on, and at the end of that time he would say, "That's fascinating, Mr. Prime Minister. If I understand what you're saying, it's X, Y, and Z." And

then he would rephrase what Diem had told him, putting across his own ideas, but making Diem think that he had thought of it himself. That's a very subtle and yet very effective method of operating. It works with bosses, it works with spouses, and it certainly worked with foreign heads of state, Diem in particular. And using that methodology Lansdale cultivated Diem and won his support and trust to employ a very ambitious--to implement a very ambitious pacification program. For example, operation Passage to Freedom, where Lansdale enlisted the US navy to move more than 9,000 refugees from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, thereby greatly strengthening the state of South Vietnam. And Lansdale being Lansdale, there had to be psychological warfare component to the operation, for example hiring a soothsayer to predict bad fortune for North Vietnam and good fortune for South Vietnam. There was also operation Brotherhood, bringing over Filipino doctors and nurses to provide free medical care to the people of south Vietnam in order to win their allegiance for the government. Now, not everybody in the US government thought that this CIA officer and air force colonel should be engaged in this very ambitious nation building experiment in South Vietnam. And among the skeptics was Lansdale's own boss, General Lightning Joe Collins, great hero of WWII, four star general, former army chief of staff who had been appointed by his friend general Eisenhower as the US ambassador in Saigon. General Collins was a great conventional soldier but did not really have much of an understanding of unconventional warfare in Southeast Asia. And so he and Lansdale clashed from the very beginning. At the very first country team meeting, General Collins announced that he was going to downsize the size of the South Vietnamese army. He was costing too much. Lansdale objected. He said, "Well, the Viet Minh, the communists are vacating large chunks of the south Vietnamese countryside, and the army is the only part of the government that can do anything, so they have to go in there and provide governmental services. And oh, by the way, there's also all these sect military forces running around, and you have to demobilize these militias and incorporate them out of the army, or you're not gonna have a functioning state." Well, General Collins listened to Lansdale for a little bit, and then he had had enough, and said, "I am here as the personal representative of the president of the United States, Mister, and you're out of order. Have a seat." Well, as that point most colonels if told to have a seat by a four star general, would in fact have a seat. But Lansdale was not your average officer. He was in fact an inveterate maverick and troublemaker. So instead of having a seat he stood up and said, "Well, sir, you may be here as the personal representative of the president of the United States, but I'm convinced that if the people of the United States could hear what you had to say, they would disagree with you. On behalf--and I'm here to speak up on behalf of the people of the United States, and on behalf of the people of the United States, we're walking out on you." And out he walked out the door. Now, don't try this at home.

(Laughter)

Boot: It's probably not gonna end well or your career. The fact that Lansdale was able to survive, it was testament to the fact that he had protectorates even more powerful than four-star generals, because he had the patronage of the Dulles brothers, who were the true kingmakers in Washington in the 1950s. An that fact proved of pivotal importance in the spring of 1955 during the major crisis of Diem's consolidation of power, the Battle of Saigon, when at Lansdale's urging, Diem sent the South Vietnamese army into the streets of Saigon to break the hold of these militias forces that were threatening the central government's authority. The result was a tough urban battle. It was tough and go for a while. General Collins wanted to abandon Diem, but Lansdale went right over his head, straight to Allen Dulles, who in turn went to President Eisenhower and overruled his ambassador. And so thanks to Lansdale's intervention, Diem was able to keep US

support, and he was able to defeat the sect military forces. By 1956 Diem appeared to be pretty well consolidated in power. And this is Diem touring a part the provinces that have been pacified at Lansdale's action. By this point Diem was seen much like Magsaysay was, as a bulwark of nationalism and anticommunism in Southeast Asia. He got a ticker tape parade on Broadway. He was seen as a great American ally, and Ed Lansdale came home a bigger hero than ever. And this is him receiving a medal from vice president Nixon as his wife Helen looks on. Now, by the late-1950s, early-1960s, Ed Lansdale as becoming the least-secret secret agent on the planet. He was in fact becoming pretty famous. He was said to be the model for the quiet American and the ugly American. He was picking up all sorts of nicknames like the American James Bond and the T. Lawrence of Asia. When the Kennedy administration came into power, they're pretty enamored of Ed Lansdale. He seemed like the kind of can-do covert operative that they loved. As a result of that they assign him to their top-priority mission. And what was the top priority for the Kennedy administration? It was overthrowing Fidel Castro, who had humiliated and embarrassed the Kennedys in their earlier days of administration because of the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, which Ed Lansdale had opposed. The Kennedys were determined to get their revenge, to overthrow or kill Castro. They didn't really care how they did it; they wanted him gone. But they had lost confidence in the CIA, which had orchestrated the Bay of Pigs. So instead of turning to the CIA they turned to the American James Bond. And at the end of 1961 Ed Lansdale was appointed operations director of Operation Mongoose, this top-secret interagency effort to get rid of Castro. Lansdale quickly ascertained that the only way you're gonna overthrow castor in short order was with an American military invasion. But the Kennedys didn't want to invade Cuba. What they wanted was some kind of covert action gimmick that would enable them to get rid of Castro at scant risk to themselves. And so Lansdale spent much of 1962 trying to provide that gimmick. And the result was stuff like this. This was a CIA propaganda poster featuring Gusano Libre. Free Worm, because Castro called his enemies worms, and so the CIA was gonna turn that against them and make Free Worm the symbol of the Cuban resistance. And this is Free Worm cutting power lines. Now you have to admit this was undoubtedly the cutest mascot that any insurgency has ever had, but it wasn't very successful. The only thing that Operation Mongoose achieved was it generally the intelligence that alerted policymakers in Washington that Nikita Khrushchev was placing nuclear missiles into Cuba. But after the conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962, Operation mongoose was disbanded and Ed Lansdale lost the favor of the Kennedys. And that in turn left him naked before his many bureaucratic enemies, of whom the most important was his own boss, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Now the two were like oil and water. McNamara came to the pentagon form having run the Ford Motor Company, graduate of the Harvard business school and, truth in labeling, also of my alma mater UC Berkley. He was somebody who was enamored of numbers, of systems analysis, computers, a very smart guy at some level, but he had no background in counterinsurgency or people's war in Southeast Asia. Lansdale tried to begin his education. Having just returned from a trip to Vietnam, Lansdale brought back with him some souvenirs, some captured Viet Cong weaponry--some very simple pistols and rifles and sharpened spears--all covered in mud and blood, and he walked into McNamara's cavernous office with these weapons and dumped them on McNamara's immaculate desk. And he said, Mr. Secretary, these are the weapons being used by our enemies in Vietnam. They're not very sophisticated, and the people using these weapons, you would not even recognize them as soldiers. They wear black pajamas and rubber sandals, but they're licking the soldiers on our side, and are equipped with all the best gear that the US army can provide, because these soldiers have the power of an idea, the power of an idea, and the only way we're gonna

beat them is if we offer a more powerful idea to the people of South Vietnam, because we're not going to bomb this revolution into oblivion." Now in hindsight this sounds like pretty wise advice, but McNamara was invincible armored in his arrogance and ignorance and chose to disregard what Ed Lansdale had to say. And so by 1963 Lansdale was almost entirely cut out of policy making towards Vietnam, even as the situation reached a crisis point. That is the year of the Buddhist revolt against Diem. You had Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire in the streets of Saigon. That convinced the Kennedy administration that the only way to defeat communism was to defeat Diem, to back a military coup against Diem. Lansdale warned them not to do this. He said, "I know Diem. I know he's imperfect, but I believe he's the least bad option that we have." and Lansdale added, "I also know the generals, and I believe that if they take over they would be far more corrupt, far less effective, far less legitimate than Diem has been. Please don't do this," he warned anybody that would listen in the Kennedy administration, but they weren't listening. At the beginning of November 1963, coincidentally at the same time that Lansdale was being retired from the pentagon as a two-star general, the military coup backed by the United States went forward. Within twenty-four hours Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu had been murdered, and the consequences were every bit as catastrophic as Lansdale had warned. The Viet Cong later called this "a heaven-sent gift for us." They stepped up their infiltrations of South Vietnam. South Vietnam saw military coups after military coups. The government was fatally destabilized. It could no longer protect itself. And by 1965 Lyndon Johnson decided the only way to preserve south Vietnam's independence was to start bombing north Vietnam and to send American combat troops into south Vietnam. This was a decision that Ed Lansdale opposed. He wanted to save South Vietnam, but he didn't want to Americanize the war. He thought the South Vietnamese should defend their own country with America in the background as advisors. His advice is once again disregarded. He went back to Vietnam in 1965, and this is him arriving in Saigon, this time working at the US embassy to try to salvage what he already saw as a losing situation. His boss was the US ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. It was not a marriage made in heaven. Henry Cabot Lodge had been the US ambassador in 1963 who had overseen the overthrow and murder of Ed Lansdale's friend Ngo Dinh Diem. Now in the past in the 1950s Lansdale had no problem overriding mere ambassadors. That wasn't so easy to do, however, in the 1960s because he could no longer count on the patronage of somebody like the Dulles brothers. His most powerful supporter in the Johnson administration was Vice President Hubert Humphrey, but unfortunately Hubert Humphrey was almost powerless to affect LBJ's decision-making on Vietnam. And just as he had done in the past, Lansdale tried to cultivate a new protégé in the mold of a Magsaysay or a Diem. He tried to work with Nguyen Cao Ky, this very flashy air force vice marshal, who was prime minister and later vice president of South Vietnam. But Ky lost a power struggle with an army general named Huynh Van Tu, who eventually emerged as a strong man of the military junta. So in the mid-1960s Ed Lansdale lacked both a powerful protector in Washington and a powerful protégé on the ground in South Vietnam. And therefore he was left as virtually a spectator to observe the big unit course of this conventional conflict, with the free-fire zones, the search and destroy missions, and all the rest of it. General William Westmoreland was convinced that he could kill the Viet Cong faster than they could be replaced. Lansdale counseled him, this was an illusion. It was never gonna work, that the only way to win was to stand up a stable and popular government in south Vietnam that could command the allegiance of its people. He was once again ignored, until finally in 1968 after the start of the Tet Offensive, his advice became un-ignorable. The Tet Offensive revealed that the claims of light at the end of the tunnel that Westmoreland and Johnson and others were making in 1967 were

hollow. Lansdale immediately perceived that the Tet Offensive was not this great military victory as claimed by General Westmoreland, but it was in fact a crippling psychological blow that helped destroy American public support for the war effort. By the time he went home for the final time in June of 1968 he was feeling very much dejected, defeated, and demoralized. He was not greatly surprised when a few years later in the spring of 1975 North Vietnam invaded and very quickly occupied the husk of a state that was South Vietnam. Now the question that I raise in my book--the reason it's called *The Road Not Taken*--is what would have happened if Ed Lansdale's advice had been listened to. There's no way to know, and I certainly can't stand up here and claim that only if Ed Lansdale's advice had been listened to, that everything would have worked out fine, that South Vietnam would still exist and we would have won the war. That's possible, we just don't know. But whatever happened, whatever Lansdale did or did not do, North Vietnam was always going to be a formidable adversary, probably with more will to win than we had. But although I can't promise that the Lansdale path would have delivered victory, one thing I am pretty certain of, which is that even if we had still lost, the cost of defeat would have been much lower. It would not have the sacrifice of 58,000 American lives and millions of Vietnamese lives. Because Lansdale never wanted to see this conventional big-unit war being fought by American soldiers in the first place. And he would be haunted to the end of his days with the sense of failure and these what-ifs and might-have-beens and what could have happened. He ended his career in failure. He did however find some happiness in his personal life. After his first wife died, Pat Kelly who by that point was still unmarried and had just retired from the US agency in Manila, moved to the United States. And on July 4th of 1973, the two lovebirds tied the knot. And this is them in the kitchen of their house in northern Virginia where they lived happily ever after until Lansdale's own demise from natural causes in 1987. And I must say that having spent the last five years studying Ed Lansdale's life, it was very moving for me to visit his grave in Arlington National Cemetery. I felt like I really knew the guy, in some ways better than I know my own father, which partly has to do with my relationship with my father, but also has to do with the way that I got into Lansdale's life. And the story took twists and turns I did not expect. I knew it was gonna be a story about the Vietnam war, but I didn't realize the extent to which it would be an adventure story, a spy story, and above all a romance. You know, I'm a knuckle-dragging military historian here at this premier military history library, and so I did not expect to be writing a romance, but that is in fact what I wrote. And I was very moved by describing the relationship between Ed Lansdale and Pat Kelly. Now the final point that I would make is I do think that this story has some resonance for the present day, because we are once again engaged in a great counterinsurgency. This time not against communist insurgents as in Lansdale's day, but against Islamist insurgents. And how are we gonna win the war on terror? If in fact we did win the war on terror, I would summate it's probably not gonna be with American combat troops. We're not gonna send large numbers of troops to occupy the greater middle east. Been there, done that, tried it, didn't like it, probably not gonna do it again any time soon. So if we're not gonna win with American combat troops, how are we gonna win? I suggest it's probably gonna be with American advisors, with small teams of military diplomatic and intelligence personnel fanning out to these frontline states to buttress their capabilities, to fight our mutual enemies, much as we did recently in the battle against Islamic state. And if you think about advisors, you have to think about Ed Lansdale, who is one of the most storied and successful advisors of the 20th century, right up there with T Lawrence. So I think this book has a lot of lessons for future advisors, and they're not all positive. He didn't do everything right. This is not a hagiography. I talk about a lot of his mistakes, but I think he got one big thing right, which is that he figured out how to empathize--how to weaponize empathy, how to take

emotional intelligence and send it marching into battle. His--Ed Lansdale's ability to establish close relationships with foreign leaders like Ramon Magsaysay and Ngo Dinh Diem was crucial to his ability to achieve American objectives in those countries at least for a time being. And that's something that I think we should think about as we think about the future of American grand strategy. So with that, let me stop talking at you, and I'd love to hear your comments or questions.

(Applause)

1: I guess I'm questioning whether that Lansdale strategy would have worked in Vietnam and then in Iraq and Iran. It really seemed, even from the prologue of your book, that the regime in Vietnam that we initially supported was not only fairly corrupt but also anti-Buddhist. And the Buddhists were very significant there. So there was an internal war, because Diem's brother set up against the Catholics. The Catholics were a minority. So it just didn't seem like there was the same potential to find this figure that you talk about from the past. And then when you talk about Iraq and Afghanistan, it just seems like the leadership has been contrary to the interest of the people, you know, and that we haven't found that same capacity to create a leader. And it's seemed by the opposition that we're putting puppets in power, and that maybe that Lansdale idea just faded out of existence as a viable strategy. Not that the strategy we took I'm recommending. That didn't work either. But I'm just wondering if Lansdale's idea had become militarily and otherwise irrelevant.

Boot: Well, there's no question that you're not always gonna have leaders of the caliber of Ramon Magsaysay to work with, although I will add that when Ed Lansdale started working with Ramon Magsaysay in 1950, nobody imagines that Magsaysay was gonna be the savior of the Philippines. I would say that most of the leaders that we work with as heads of allied countries are far from ideal but most of them are also not a lost cause. And I'm thinking in particular of leaders like Hamid Karzai and Nouri al-Maliki in Afghanistan and Iraq. In recent years where I think we could have done a lot more with them than we in fact did, and we could have avoided, perhaps, these deadly confrontations where we became crosswise with our won allies and therefore made it almost impossible to achieve our objectives, much in the same way as we did with Ngo Dinh Diem in the early 1960s. And there's no question that Diem was imperfect, although I would push back on a couple of things that you said. I don't think he was actually corrupt. Diem was quite ascetic. He wasn't interested in money. And I wouldn't necessarily say that he was necessarily anti-Buddhist. In fact a majority of his cabinet and generals were Buddhist, but there is no question that his brother the catholic archbishop sparked a crisis with a militant Buddhist group in 1963, and that spun out of control. He might have been able to conciliate them, and in fact might have done so if he had somebody like Ed Lansdale on his side pushing him to conciliate, but instead he had his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu who was pushing him in an authoritarian and fascist direction. And of course Ngo Dinh Nhu's wife, the infamous dragon lady Madam Nhu, who talked about how she enjoyed--she would happily pour more gasoline on the Buddhist bonzes barbecuing themselves and therefore just, you know, added more fuel to the fire. But you know, Lansdale's judgment was that even with all his faults, Lansdale--that Diem was the least bad alternative that we had in South Vietnam, and that we had to work with him. And I think that's actually borne out by the evidence, because, you know, Diem has gotten terrible press at the time and since. If you watch the Ken Burns Vietnam documentary for example, in episode it talks about what a terrible leader he was and so forth, but then you have to immediately transition to talk about what happened after Diem was overthrown and if Diem was the problem in South Vietnam, then how come the situation after he was overthrown got worse rather than better. I mean, in hindsight I

think Lansdale's judgment was vindicated that for all of Diem's problems, we were better off working with that guy than trying to back a military coup.

2: Everything I've heard about Lansdale from your talk and elsewhere focuses on his relationship with national leaders and the politics of Magsaysay's brilliant presidential election. Did Lansdale also look beyond the capital to the relationship between national leadership and local politics, or was that something that he was really focused on building a national political leadership and not involved in engineering a local political base for the regime?

Boot: Oh, no, in fact Lansdale spent most of his time trying to engineer a political base outside the capital, and in fact he became renowned for all the time that he spent outside the capitals of Manila and Saigon. I mean, he was the basis for one of the positive characters in the Ugly American-- Colonel Edwin Barnum Hillandale, that book was written by one of his friends. And it somewhat exaggerated the Lansdale mystique, and it had Colonel Hillandale riding his motorcycle in the provinces of the Philippines playing his harmonica, eating in these cheap roadside eateries and becoming immersed in Filipino culture. And Lansdale later joked that a lot of Americans in Vietnam later started riding motorcycles around the country and started getting killed because that was a dangerous thing to do. But, so it was a slightly exaggerated form of Lansdale, but in fact the basic essence was true, that he spent a lot of time in the Philippine countryside and in the South Vietnamese countryside as well because he really wanted to meet a cross section of the country. He didn't just limit himself to the cocktail circuit like so many Americans, and he didn't just limit himself to working with the national leaders. He got to know labor leaders, religious leaders, village leaders, ordinary people on all sides of these civil wars. And so he actually tried to educate himself as much as possible on what was going on, and he was able to do that because he spent quite a few years in those countries. I mean, he spent seven years in the Philippines, and he spent more than five years in Vietnam. And so he became very educated on local conditions, local politics. In fact, by the end of his time in Vietnam in 1967, '68, he was writing very thick memos to try to help American officials understand the Byzantine politics of south Vietnam, the different factions and their interests, religious leaders, who was who. Of course most people in the US government didn't know and couldn't care less. They didn't think it was important, because all they cared was that we could deliver a lot of firepower on target. But Lansdale thought it was crucially important to understand the local lay of the land, and only by understanding that could he then advise someone like Magsaysay or Diem what to do because he couldn't just advise them in a bubble or a vacuum. He really had to understand what was going on. And the irony of Ed Lansdale, and there's quite a few ironies, is that by the late 60s, you know, when he was kind of at a low point at his power in Vietnam, and he was powerless to affect the big green machine that had taken over the Vietnam War, that was when he met a lot of these correspondents like Neil Sheehan, David Halberstam, Frankie Fitzgerald, and others, and they formed kind of a low opinion of him. They thought he was kind of a huckster and this very simple-minded ad-man that was repeating these American bromides about democracy and freedom and didn't really understand local conditions. Whereas in fact Lansdale had spent more time understanding local conditions in Vietnam than they had. He'd been there longer than they had. And he was actually in private a very sophisticated and nuanced analyst was not at all drinking the Kool-Aid as people might have imagined from some of his attempts to keep a stiff upper lip in public.

3: Having spent a couple of years in Thailand during the 1960s I became aware of Jim Thompson, former OSS who was credited with reestablishing the Thai silk industry. Do you know if there's any contact with Ed Lansdale and Thompson?

Boot: Not that I know of. I mean, there's a book written about Thompson written by my colleague at the Council, Josh Kurlantzick, which I would urge you to check out if you're interested, but I'm not aware of any connection between the two of them. Lansdale really just operated in Vietnam. Although you now, such was his myth that whenever he elided in any other Asian country, rumors immediately started that he was about to overthrow the government. And in fact when he showed up in Cambodia for like a two-week visit in the early 1960s, and there happened to be a coup attempt a few weeks after that, Prince Sihanouk blamed Ed Lansdale for the coup and then subsequently made a movie in which the villain was this Ed Lansdale-like character. But that was really a sign of his legend, his reputation had run away with him. Not even Ed Lansdale could format a coup after spending just two weeks in some country.

4: I think most of us understand the fact that Lansdale went through a period of familiarity, and you think that our political or foreign diplomacy would be based on something like that, because it's effective, and yet I don't know whether it's arrogance or what it is, that we don't pay attention to effectiveness. And we keep making a lot of mistakes. Vietnam today is one of our economic partners. We do trade with Vietnam, and when Americans go to Vietnam they're welcomed as people that are being loved. And that's really the point that I want to make, that we don't pay attention to empathy and familiarity.

Boot: I think that's very true. Two points very quickly. One is, our personnel system makes it impossible for people to spend as much time in country as Lansdale did because we're always moving people in and out all the time. We're rotating people, so it makes it hard to build up these, kind of, long term relationships. See what I said about the people with the microphones are the most powerful people here?

(Laughter)

Boot: So, A, the fact that we're constantly moving people around makes it very hard to establish these kinds of relationships. Second point I would make, you know, when I started this book I certainly did not have Donald Trump in mind. I mean, I started writing this in 2013. Right, I mean, if you told me at that point that Donald Trump was gonna become president, I would have thought that was some kind of plot for dystopian science fiction movie. But you know, I have to say that there is something appropriate here, because I feel like in some ways Donald Trump is kind of the anti-Lansdale because Lansdale believed in engaging the world with empathy, with kindness, with understanding, with humility, trying to make friends in these countries and to win them over with gentle persuasion. I think fair to say that's probably not the MO of our current president, who in fact believes in slinging bizarre insults on Twitter and writing off entire continents with pejorative comments. And so I think that makes it very hard for our soldiers, diplomats, and intelligence personnel who want to do the kind of Ed Lansdale approach. Before he was fired by Tweet, Rex Tillerson went off to Africa. And I don't know how that trip went, but probably not great, I would guess, given the comments that Trump had previously made about Africa. You know, I think in some ways, Trump when it comes to soft power is practicing unilateral disarmament. And he's making it very hard to try to employ that Lansdale-ian approach, even if there are people in the US government who are inclined to do so. And I think it will--that's a huge barrier. And I think it would be more effective if we used more of the Ed Lansdale and less of the hectoring, Trumpian approach.

5: After the Ken Burns history, thinking about--I wonder if Lansdale ever realized that perhaps Ho Chi Minh might have been his man. That he wasn't, after Dien Bien Phu, such a dyed-in-the-wool communist, as he was always portrayed. Would Lansdale have suspected that?

Boot: Well, Lansdale would not have suspected it. And I think the reason he would not have suspected is, I don't think it was true. I mean, Ho Chi Minh was in fact a dedicated communist. He was an operative of the communter, and he had lived in Moscow during the Stalinist years in the 1930s. He was--he genuinely believed in communism. He sometimes tried to pretend otherwise because he did receive help from the United States from the OSS in WWII. And then when he declared a Republic of Vietnam, he quoted form the Declaration of Independence. He sent letters to Harry Truman asking for help, and subsequently some people said, well, wasn't Ho Chi Minh a potential ally of the United States? Why didn't we embrace him? The reality is, that was just a ruse because he wanted to keep the United States from supporting the French in their bid to reoccupy their empire in Indochina. He was never really gonna be a liberal democrat, and in fact when he took over North Vietnam in 1954 he killed tens of thousands of so-called landlords and non-communist Vietnamese nationalists. And then of course there was a much larger purge carried out by his successor Le Xuan when he conquered South Vietnam in 1975. But even though Ho Chi Minh was a genuine communist, and that was not an illusion, he was also a genuine nationalist. And he didn't see any conflict between those two ideologies. And I think the American policy makers--they didn't underestimate his communism. They understood that. I think what they underestimated was his nationalism, because there was kind of an assumption in Washington in the 50s and 60s that if the communists took over Vietnam, that they would essentially be servants of Moscow and Beijing. And that was obviously not the case because shortly after the communist takeover in 1975 Vietnam went to war against their former patrons in China. And I think the failure of understanding there was not imagining that Ho Chi Minh could be anything but a communist. I think the failure was not to understand that he could be an independent communist, and that you could have communist regimes that would not necessarily take orders from Moscow or Beijing. I think that was--that was the big intellectual shortfall that American policy makers had.

(Applause)

Clarke: Thank you to Max Boot for an outstanding discussion, and to the to Council on Foreign Relations for sponsoring this program. The book is *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam*, published by Liveright. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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