

McMaster Was the Best Choice to Be President Trump's National Security Adviser

President Donald Trump has selected the best possible person to serve as his national security adviser. Army Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster epitomizes the warrior-scholar in the tradition of Carl von Clausewitz.

The U.S. Army was out of Vietnam for 11 years when, in 1984, McMaster took his oath as a second lieutenant at West Point. He was a cadet when Army Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., a Korean War and two-tour Vietnam War combat veteran, published *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*. His controversial thesis was that the Army wasted time focusing on counter-insurgency—something he dubbed “lunging at the toreador’s cape” in a guerrilla war. This weakened the Army and strained American will so much that by the early 1970s, when the conventionally arrayed People’s Army of Vietnam assumed the major role in the war, broken American forces had mostly withdrawn. By 1974, a decade before McMaster, the Army entered recovery mode. Colonel Summer’s book legitimized criticism among military professionals of the Vietnam-era Army.

On the night and morning of Feb. 27-28, 1991, Captain McMaster led Eagle Troop in the Battle of 73/74 Easting. His tank company—consisting of 120 troops manning nine M-1A1 Abrams tanks and a dozen M3 Bradley fighting vehicles—engaged and destroyed 28 Iraqi tanks, 16 armored personnel carriers, and 30 trucks in a half-hour. Shortly thereafter, his company encountered and destroyed another 20 Iraqi T-72 tanks.

Five years later, McMaster was completing his doctorate in history at the University of North Carolina under professor

Richard H. Kohn. During the early 1980s, Dr. Kohn had been the civilian chief of the Office of Air Force History, where U.S. Air Force historians wrote a 14-volume official history of that service's role in the Vietnam War. Kohn understood the service's reluctance to critically examine a war that many of its top generals claimed to have "won" during the 11-day pounding of North Vietnam conducted largely by B-52s in December 1972. The Air Force had a much more difficult time accepting the Vietnam War as something other than an unbroken string of unmitigated air-power victories.

During the post-Cold War 1990s, the Army, having reorganized into the all-volunteer force and derived some honest lessons from Vietnam, looked to a future "digitized battlefield" where it would find, fix and annihilate enemy forces. At Ft. Irwin, California, Major McMaster served as operations officer for the armored Opposition Force (OPFOR), a tank brigade structured and largely accoutered like foreign (primarily Russian) brigades, employing their tactics. McMaster, already a credentialed historian with his dissertation, "Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam," published by Harper-Crown, was learning to think like the enemy.

In the 1990s, the Army War College and Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) devised the Army After Next (AAN) program to look 25 years into the future. Army Major General Robert Scales Jr., a Duke University, Ph.D., controlled the project. Unfortunately, three events derailed the AAN:

The institutional U.S. Army missed the Soviet Army grounded in its blitzkrieg doctrine, rich with tanks, artillery and air-mobile divisions. The U.S. Army's Crusader mobile gun system, upgraded M1A2 Abrams tanks, and a proposed stealth "Comanche" helicopter, were projected for the Army to serve on the digitized battlefields when the Russian Bear revived by the 2015-2020 timeframe. Russia revived but the U.S. Army got sidetracked.

Part of the sidetracking was opposition from the Army's "Old Guard" to which General Scales belonged. Their tunnel vision focused on traditional army missions and branches of armor, infantry, artillery, aviation, engineers, etc. When futurists at the Army's Strategic Studies Institute predicted a likely paradigm comprised of Islamic terrorists groups possibly armed with weapons of mass destruction, the traditionalists envisioned a rerun of counter-insurgency; special operations focused forces prompting neo-Vietnam nightmares.

Sept. 11, 2001 ended the AAN. The all-volunteer Army, restructured to fight one war intensively for a short time—while revamped Reserve and National Guard components mobilized to "finish off" the enemy—found itself involved in Afghanistan and then in Iraq and mired in unconventional warfare. The Army, as McMaster testified, suffered. Another Vietnam-like quagmire seemed possible. He also headed the Army's next future's program.

The man and history converged. Knowing that history not only determines the eternal now but also provides the only substantial guide to the future, General McMaster has—and will continue—to embrace the strategic challenges facing the Army. As the president's top advisor, McMaster's challenges now operate on a global scale. He has the combat bona fides, the strategic intellectual acumen, and that essential attribute for leadership—personal integrity—to serve well the president and the nation. God's speed, H.R.

Editor's note: Dr. Earl Tilford taught history and national security courses at Grove City College before retiring. Among his prized possessions is a copy of *Dereliction of Duty* inscribed, "To Earl Tilford, whose work was an inspiration to me and who has done so much to advance our understanding of the Vietnam War." Signed, HR McMaster.

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at Grove City College. He currently lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. A retired Air Force intelligence officer, Dr. Tilford earned his Ph.D. in American and European military history at George Washington University. From 1993 to 2001, he served as Director of Research at the U.S. Army's Strategic Studies Institute. In 2001, he left Government service for a professorship at Grove City College, where he taught courses in military history, national security and international and domestic terrorism and counter-terrorism.

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