



# Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf (The American Moment)

*Gary R. Hess*

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In 1950, Americans expected that the United States would wage another major war in the near future. Instead, over the course of the next half-century, they fought limited wars against minor powers: North Korea, North Vietnam, and Iraq. In *Presidential Decisions for War*, Gary R. Hess explores the ways in which Presidents Truman, Johnson, and Bush took America into these wars. He recreates the unfolding crises in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf, explaining why the presidents and their advisers concluded that the use of military power was ultimately necessary to uphold U.S. security. The decisions for war are then evaluated in terms of how effectively the president assessed U.S. interests, explored alternatives to war, adhered to constitutional processes, and built congressional, popular, and international support.

Once at war, each president as commander in chief faced the challenge of waging a limited war, which imposes restrictions on military operations and objectives and on the extent to which popular emotions can be aroused. After tracing how Truman, Johnson, and Bush responded to unfolding military developments, Hess evaluates the wartime leadership of each president in terms of his effectiveness in coordinating political and military objectives, managing civilian-military relations, communicating objectives and sustaining popular and congressional support, gaining and sustaining international backing, and responding to diplomatic initiatives and opportunities for peace.

*Presidential Decisions for War* concludes that the quality of presidential leadership directly affected the different outcomes of these three wars, each of which remains a topic of ongoing controversy among historians and the public.

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