

THE VIETNAM WAR DEBATE AND THE COLD WAR CONSENSUS

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2014

Abstract

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The Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were central to the change of opposition strategy in 1968. For Johnson, the Gulf of Tonkin incident had provided the political impetus to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which the administration used as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent. For Congressional dissenters in 1968, inconsistencies in Johnson's version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident allowed them to undermine the Resolution as a weapon against Congress. For the American people, revelations about the administration's dishonesty during the incident simply added to grave doubts that Americans already had about Johnson's credibility; the American people lost confidence in Johnson, ending his Presidency. The dramatic success of this new strategy—attacking the administration's credibility—encouraged other opponents to follow suit, permanently altering the framework of debate over the war.

This change in opposition strategy in 1968 had a number of important consequences. First, this change in rhetoric ultimately ended the war. To sustain his credibility against relentless attack, President Nixon repeatedly withdrew troops to prove to the American people he was ending the war. Nixon ran out of troops to withdraw and had to accept an unfavorable peace. Second, after the war, this framework for debate of military interventions established—

between advocates using the ideology of containment and opponents attacking the administration's credibility—would reemerge nearly every time an administration contemplated military intervention through the end of the Cold War. Finally, because opponents of military intervention stopped challenging containment in 1968, the American public continued to accept the precepts of containment and the Cold War consensus survived until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking the members of my dissertation committee, without whom I could not have completed this work. Professor Michael Krysko was the professor who challenged and pushed me to my first published work of history, starting me out on what has become a lifelong journey. Professor Louise Benjamin has so completely reshaped my perspective on the interaction between the public and the media that her influence has touched every work I have produced since that first day of class. Professor Kristin Mulready-Stone likewise fundamentally reshaped my perspective on East and Southeast Asia and the Western experience in both regions. Professor Derek Hoff showed me an entirely different way to look at the currents of radicalism in the 1950s and 1960s that has had a profound impact not just on this work but on my entire understanding of the Cold War era. And my major professor, Professor Donald Mrozek has been my stalwart, patient, and inspiring guide not just through this dissertation but on my path to an understanding and love of the discipline of history.

I would also like to thank the many others who made this work possible. First, I would like to thank Margaret Harman and the entire audiovisual archive team at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library for their help in making available hundreds of hours of rare television materials that were essential to the completion of this work. Likewise, I would like to thank Vera Ekechukwu and the staff in the Special Collections department at the University of Arkansas Library for their patience with me and diligence in preserving and making available the Fulbright Papers. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Vanderbilt Television News Archives at Vanderbilt University in Nashville; the service you provide is priceless.

I would also be remiss if I did not thank the members of the Graduate Admissions and Awards Committee of the history department at Kansas State University and the kind donors to

the Robin Higham Military History Graduate Student Research and Travel Fund. Without a generous grant from this fund I would not have been able to complete this work. I am humbled and honored to have been recognized with this grant and I hope that this work is worthy of your trust in me.

Thank you to my beautiful wife, Aree, and my patient and understanding children, Amy and Jonathan, for suffering the long hours and tired mornings as I completed this degree and this dissertation—not to mention the multiple military deployments in between! I am in perpetual awe of the patience and silent courage of America’s military families, and my own is no exception.

And, finally, my thanks to God, through Whom all things are made possible.

Dedication

For Aree

Introduction

Before and during the Vietnam War, both President Lyndon Johnson and President Richard Nixon used the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. From 1965 until early 1968, opponents of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam attacked this policy by arguing against the suitability of the strategy of military containment of Communism to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. These opponents also sometimes attacked the entire ideology of military containment of Communism, not just in Vietnam, but anywhere. In 1968, opponents of the Vietnam War switched tactics and began to focus instead on the President's credibility on Vietnam. These arguments quickly became the dominant critique of America's policies in Vietnam through the end of the war and were ultimately successful in ending it.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident on 4 August 1964 and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were central both to the Johnson administration's use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and to the change of opposition strategy in 1968 from attacking the administration's use of containment to justify the war to attacking the administration's credibility. For President Johnson, the Gulf of Tonkin incident both provided dramatic proof of the growing aggression of the North Vietnamese in Southeast Asia and provided the political impetus to overcome the private skepticism of many in Congress over whether the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia really required U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam. The resulting Tonkin Gulf Resolution provided the administration with an insurance policy against Congressional dissent; whatever their later misgivings, all but two members of Congress voted for the Resolution. For opponents of the war in 1968, glaring inconsistencies in the administration's version of the events of the Gulf of Tonkin incident provided compelling

evidence that the Johnson administration had lied to the American people, making the resulting Tonkin Gulf Resolution—obtained as a result of this incident—null and void. For the American people, revelations about the administration’s dishonesty during the Gulf of Tonkin incident simply added to grave doubts that Americans already had about the Johnson administration’s credibility; the American people lost confidence in President Johnson, ending his Presidency. The dramatic success of this new strategy—attacking the administration’s credibility rather than its use of containment to justify the war—encouraged most other opponents of the war to also adopt this strategy, permanently altering the framework of debate over the war.

This change in the opposition’s strategy—from attacking military containment as a justification for the war to attacking the administration’s credibility—had a number of important consequences. First, this change in rhetoric ultimately forced an end to the war. To sustain his credibility against relentless attack, President Nixon was forced to repeatedly withdraw troops to prove to the American people he was making good on his pledge to bring an “honorable end” to the war. Ultimately, Nixon ran out of troops to withdraw and was forced to accept an unfavorable compromise peace. Second, this framework for public debate of foreign policy established in the latter half of the Vietnam War—between advocates of military intervention using the ideology of military containment and opponents of military intervention attacking the administration’s credibility—would remain the framework for public debate after the war and be repeated nearly every time an administration contemplated a military intervention through the end of the Cold War. Finally, and most importantly, because opponents of military intervention stopped challenging the ideology of containment, the American public continued to accept the precepts of containment and the Cold War consensus survived until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

From the beginning of his Presidency in November 1963 until August 1964, President Lyndon Johnson used arguments founded in the Cold War ideology of containment of Communism to justify U.S. military involvement in the conflict in Vietnam, just as his predecessor, John F. Kennedy, had. Few publicly opposed these arguments or the ideology of military containment of Communism that was the core of the broader Cold War consensus on American foreign policy. Still, despite a concerted public information campaign by the administration to build a consensus in Congress and among the public for the direct employment of American military force in Vietnam, the public and Congress did not support an American military escalation in Vietnam.

On 2 August 1964, the *U.S.S Maddox* was in the Gulf of Tonkin supporting raids by South Vietnamese commandos (with American advisors in support) when three North Vietnamese patrol boats launched an attack on the *Maddox*. The attack was turned away, with one patrol boat sunk and the others damaged. On 4 August, the *Maddox*, joined by the destroyer *U.S.S. Turner Joy* reported that it was again attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats.

President Lyndon Johnson used this incident in the Gulf of Tonkin on 4 August 1964 to justify a retaliatory air strike and to win a Congressional endorsement—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—to use military force to protect the sovereignty of South Vietnam from what his administration described as northern aggression. After the incident and the retaliation, the Johnson administration continued to use the ideology of military containment of Communism—as well as the tit-for-tat precedent of these initial retaliatory air strikes and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution itself—as justification to “Americanize” the Vietnam War through a series of

escalations that started with sustained bombing of the North and ended with over 500,000 U.S. troops fighting in the jungles of South Vietnam.

During this same period, a growing number of opponents of President Johnson's policies in Vietnam began a dramatic broadening of the public foreign policy debate, attacking not just justifications for the Vietnam War rooted in the military containment of Communism, but also attacking the broader ideology of military containment itself. These antiwar arguments ultimately had little impact on public support for the Vietnam War.

In early 1968, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong insurgents initiated a massive, coordinated attack across South Vietnam in an effort to trigger a general uprising of the South Vietnamese people against their government. In the United States, this attack, initiated during the traditional ceasefire over the Vietnamese lunar New Year called "Tet," was known as the Tet Offensive.¹

In the months immediately before and during this Tet Offensive, attacks on the administration's use of military containment of Communism as justification for U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, along with attacks on the broader ideology of military containment of Communism, became much less frequent. Instead, opponents of the war began to use the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Johnson's Vietnam policy—claiming that President Johnson had deceived the Congress into passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. By the time of the 1968 Presidential election, attacks on the use of military containment of Communism to justify the Vietnam War and on the broader foreign policy paradigm of military containment had virtually disappeared. Instead, antiwar arguments had narrowed to themes surrounding Presidential deceptiveness in the initiation, conduct, and

¹ Ronnie E. Ford, *Tet 1968: Understanding the Surprise*, (New York: Frank Cass, 1995), 1-4.

resolution of the war. These latter themes became the dominant critique throughout the remainder of the Vietnam War and, in fact, were decisive in undermining Congressional and public support for the war and ultimately ending it.

However, ending the war in this way—through attacks on each administration’s credibility rather than through attacks on the use of military containment of Communism as a justification for the Vietnam War or on the broader ideology of military containment of Communism—had an enduring impact on public foreign policy debate. First, the structure of the debate over U.S. policy in Vietnam during the latter days of the war—between the use of military containment as a justification for military interventions and questions about the administration’s credibility on foreign policy matters—became the framework for nearly every foreign policy debate throughout the remainder of the Cold War. More importantly, however, while many foreign policy leaders in and out of government opposed the ideology of military containment after the end of the war, the American public continued to support this foreign policy framework. In other words, while the Cold War consensus among members of Congress and foreign policy experts outside of government was broken, the Cold War consensus among the broader American public survived the Vietnam War, perpetuating the Cold War to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Methodology

This work is a history of United States mass politics. The term “mass politics” is used here to distinguish the topic of this dissertation from intra-governmental politics (the interactions between individuals and groups within the government of the United States) or international politics (the interactions between the United States’ government and the governments of other countries).

In form, this dissertation will sometimes look very similar to an intellectual history; it will examine ideas, the competition between ideas, and the evolution of those ideas over time. But this mass-political history differs from an intellectual history in one important regard. The ideas in this dissertation were expressed in the media by actors in the debate over the Vietnam War with the intent to change U.S. public opinion. The actors in this history—the President and members of his administration, Members of Congress, journalists, pundits, antiwar activists, supporters of the administration’s Vietnam policy, and many others—all believed that they could influence the American people to either support or reject the Vietnam War by making arguments, by expressing these ideas. Thus, like an intellectual history, this dissertation will explore the arguments made by its subjects. However, this mass-political history will also examine the intent of the subjects in making those arguments (i.e., what impact they hoped to have on American public opinion) and the results of those arguments (i.e., changes in public opinion as expressed through polling data, letters to the editor, letters to the actors making arguments, etc.). The goal of this study is not just to understand the arguments used in the debate over the Vietnam War, but also why they were made.

The intent of this dissertation is *not* to prove any of the many mass communication theories that attempt to describe or explain the relationship between the opinions held by audiences and the media products they consume. But this dissertation does contend (and will show) that the various actors in the debate over the Vietnam War in the United States *believed* that their arguments, communicated to the American public through various print and broadcast media, would change the opinions of the American people.

The intent of this dissertation is to understand the arguments made in the media for and against the Vietnam War, why they were made, and why some were and others were not

effective in changing U.S. public opinion. And, more importantly, this dissertation is an attempt to understand what these arguments, their intent, and their effectiveness reveal about the enduring power of the ideology of military containment of Communism—the Cold War consensus—with the American people.

One final note on methodology is required to address the use of newspapers in this dissertation. While this dissertation frequently references newspapers with national reach (through actual distribution or via national wire services and syndication of articles) it also references smaller newspapers with only local or regional reach. Where this is the case, the reason is sometimes explicitly stated, as in occasions where the newspaper is from the hometown or home state of a key Member of Congress. However, where the reason for the use of a smaller newspaper is not explicitly stated, the reference is to an article in that paper that originates from a national wire service such as the Associated Press, United Press International, the *New York Times* Wire Service, or the *Washington Post* Wire Service. In these instances, it is reasonable to assume that these article also appeared in a number of other newspapers across the country, making them stories of national import and certainly of interest to this study.

Historiography

Before and during the Vietnam War, both President Lyndon Johnson and President Richard Nixon used the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The insight that the Johnson administration used the rhetoric of containment to justify the war in Vietnam is not novel. Michael Hunt is only one of the many historians who makes this claim. He writes that President Johnson's justifications for U.S.

military intervention in Vietnam “amounted to Cold War clichés.”² Stanley Karnow and A.J. Langguth both note that Johnson used this rhetoric even before he became President, while still President Kennedy’s Vice President.³ While this study does not differ from the overwhelming number of historians who write that Lyndon Johnson used containment to justify the war, this study *problematize* the administration’s use of the ideology of containment to justify the war—actually examining these arguments in detail to understand them, understand why the administration used them, and understand why they appealed to many Americans.

There is less of an historical consensus on Nixon’s use of the ideology of containment to justify continuing the war. While saying little about his rhetoric, John Lewis Gaddis claims that the Nixon administration was more concerned about the credibility of the United States’ worldwide commitments than the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia.⁴ Michael Hunt is also silent on Nixon’s rhetoric, but claims that Nixon and Kissinger actually abandoned the ideology of containment in favor of détente.⁵ Social psychologist Milton J. Rosenberg similarly cites the “Nixon-Kissinger policies of détente with the Soviets and entente with China” as a departure from the ideology of containment.⁶ Sociologist Jerry Wayne Sanders writes that Nixon’s departure from containment marked the final collapse of “Containment Militarism” that began with the internal revolt of the “Wise Men” (Johnson’s advisors on Vietnam policy) during

² Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War: America’s Cold War Crusade in Vietnam 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 93.

³ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 267; A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 131-132.

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University, 1982), 298-303.

⁵ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University, 1987), 182-183.

⁶ Milton J. Rosenberg, “The Decline and Rise of the Cold War Consensus,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1981, 7-9.

the Tet Offensive.⁷ This dissertation will examine President Nixon's rhetoric to show that, like President Johnson, President Nixon and his administration used the ideology military containment of Communism to justify continuing the war in Vietnam to an "honorable end."

From 1965 until early 1968, opponents of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam attacked the Johnson administration's policy by arguing against the suitability of the strategy of military containment of Communism to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. These opponents also sometimes attacked the entire ideology of military containment of Communism, not just in Vietnam, but anywhere. A number of scholars have reached similar conclusions. Andrew Hunt cites the efforts of antiwar activists such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) as dismantling the Cold War consensus on foreign policy.⁸ H.W. Brands writes that the more radical dissent of the New Left created space for criticism of the war, a space that was filled by Senate Democrats upset with the expanding war.⁹ Langguth is dismissive of radical protesters, painting them as the fringes of society, not taken seriously by mainstream Americans.¹⁰ Gary Hess writes that February 1966 hearings held by Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, were significant in that they were the first time the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had challenged Presidential foreign policymaking since the beginning of the Cold War.¹¹ Kevin Williams writes that these

⁷ Jerry Wayne Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1983), 12-17, 135-141.

⁸ Andrew Hunt "When Did the Sixties Happen? Searching for New Directions," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 1999): 147-161.

⁹ H. W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2001), 98-103, 111-125.

¹⁰ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 459.

¹¹ Gary Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 121-122.

hearings marked the first consistent airing of criticism of the war by the national television networks.¹² Yet, few historians have examined in detail the actual arguments made by these dissenters. Just as with the Johnson and Nixon administrations' use of the ideology of containment to justify the war in Vietnam, this dissertation will problematize the critiques of this ideology and its application to the war in Vietnam to understand why dissenters made these arguments and why they failed to persuade most Americans to oppose the war.

In 1968, opponents of the Vietnam War switched tactics and began to focus their attacks on the President's credibility regarding Vietnam rather than on the ideology of containment or its application to Vietnam. In the years since the end of the war, the historical narrative of President Johnson's dishonesty in starting and prosecuting the Vietnam War has become the dominant narrative of his Presidency. Liebovich, Williams, and Record are among the many historians that identify a growing "credibility gap" as responsible for ever-declining public support for the war in the years before the Tet Offensive.¹³ Karnow concludes that the Tet Offensive and Westmoreland's denials that he had asked for more troops broadened "the already gaping credibility gap into a veritable canyon."¹⁴ This study will show that, while there were occasional attacks on the administration's credibility in 1966 and 1967, it was not until 1968 that they became the dominant critique of the war. Moreover, this study will show that this change in the rhetoric of opposition to the war was the result of the confluence of two events: the Tet Offensive—which called into question the administration's rosy predictions for the war from late 1967—and Senator J. William Fulbright's fateful decision to hold hearings in February 1968 not

¹² Kevin Williams, "Vietnam: The First Living Room War," in *The Fog of War: The Media on the Battlefield* by Derrick Mercer, Geoff Mungham, Kevin Williams, and Sir Tom Hopkinson, (London: Heinemann, 1987), 227-228.

¹³ Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 44; Williams, "Vietnam," 255; Jeffrey Record, *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 42.

¹⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 559, 562, 571-572.

on the ideology of containment but on the administration's account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

After these hearings, attacks on administration credibility quickly became the dominant critique of America's policies in Vietnam through the end of the war. Historians are largely silent on whether opponents of the war attacked President Nixon's credibility on the war (though, of course, a great deal has been written about the Watergate scandal and its impact on the Nixon Presidency). H.W. Brands is one of the few historians who notes the role that Nixon's supposed deceptions played in destroying the public consensus on the war.¹⁵ This study will show that, after the perceived success of the 1968 Fulbright hearings, opponents of the war largely stopped attacking the ideology of containment or its application to the war in Vietnam and instead began attacking administration credibility. This new strategy for opposition to the war would continue through the Nixon administration until the end of the war.

In fact, this new strategy of dissent—attacking administration credibility rather than the ideology of containment—was ultimately successful in ending the war. This dissertation will show that opponents of the war used a number of events to effectively attack President Nixon's credibility. The Cambodian Incursion opened Nixon to criticism that he was expanding rather than ending the war as he had promised to do. The poor performance of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in the Laos Incursion called into question the credibility of the administration's claims about Vietnamization. The Pentagon Papers became central to the debate in the latter days of the Vietnam War because of their power to reinforce the narrative of the administration's dishonesty. And the end of the My Lai massacre trial and the demonstrations by

¹⁵ H. W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2001), 98-103, 111-125.

the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) created doubts about the credibility of the Nixon administration on the conduct of the war. The Nixon administration used troop withdrawals to counter these blows to its credibility—in essence to “purchase” credibility with the American public by proving it was ending the war as it had promised. But it could not continue this strategy indefinitely; eventually the Nixon administration ran out of troops to withdraw and had to accept a humiliating compromise peace with North Vietnam that paved the way for the destruction of South Vietnam.

Historians examining these discreet events frequently miss their connection to President Nixon’s credibility or his ability to continue the war in Vietnam. For instance, most historians examining the publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times* in 1971 concentrate on the battle in the Supreme Court over the publication of the papers while others, like John Prados and Margaret Pratt Porter focus on the mystery of why Nixon would oppose publication of documents that mainly damaged the legacy of Democratic administrations.¹⁶ H.W. Brands and David Rudenstine are in fact among the few historian who comment on the ways in which the publication of the Pentagon Papers affected the debate over the Vietnam War.¹⁷ This dissertation will show that the Pentagon Papers, like the Cambodian Incursion, the Laos Incursion, the verdict in the My Lai massacre trial, and protests by the VVAW, all directly impacted the President’s credibility, forcing him to respond with repeated troop withdrawals that helped to restore his credibility but ultimately left him unable to continue the war in Vietnam.

¹⁶ John Prados and Margaret Pratt Porter, eds., *Inside the Pentagon Papers* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

¹⁷ H. W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2001), 98-103, 111-125; David Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped: A History of the Pentagon Papers Case* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1996), 6.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident on 4 August 1964 was central to the Johnson administration's use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. For President Johnson, the Gulf of Tonkin incident both provided dramatic proof of the North Vietnamese' growing aggression in Southeast Asia and provided the political impetus to overcome the private skepticism of many in Congress over whether the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia was really important enough to warrant U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam.

Many historians have argued that President Johnson intended to escalate American involvement in the Vietnam War well before the Gulf of Tonkin incident. A.J. Langguth, Jeffrey Helsing, and Michael H. Hunt all show that Johnson was signaling that stronger action might be coming even before the supposed attack in the Gulf of Tonkin.¹⁸ Christopher Kauffman is among historians who go further, claiming that the President was spoiling for a fight and was trying to goad the North Vietnamese into creating a pretext for direct U.S. action.¹⁹ Joseph Bruce Hamilton concedes that the administration probably believed the Gulf of Tonkin incident was a genuine attack on U.S. naval forces, but still writes that the President used the Gulf of Tonkin incident as a pretext to begin a direct U.S. role in the war that he had always intended to initiate.²⁰ Fredrik Logevall provides perhaps the most detailed examination of President

¹⁸ A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 279; Jeffrey W. Helsing, *Johnson's War/Johnson's Great Society: The Guns and Butter Trap* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 4; Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 82-83.

¹⁹ Christopher J. Kauffman, "Politics, Programs, and Protests: Catholic Relief Services in Vietnam, 1954-1975," *Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (April 2005), 223-250.

²⁰ Joseph Bruce Hamilton, *Faux Casus Belli: The Role of Unsubstantiated Attacks in the Initiation of Military Action for Domestic Political Purposes* (Dissertation in International Relations, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, March 2000), 136-7, 128-130.

Johnson's political calculations before the Gulf of Tonkin incident, concluding that when the incident occurred the Johnson administration decided that the imperative to "save" South Vietnam outweighed the risk of possibly alienating voters by being too aggressive in Vietnam.²¹

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was also central to the Johnson administration's use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The resulting Tonkin Gulf Resolution provided the administration with an insurance policy against Congressional dissent; whatever their later misgivings, all but two Members of Congress voted for the Resolution, which endorsed the President's conclusion that Southeast Asia was vital to U.S. national security and his determination to use U.S. military forces to contain Communist expansion there.

Edwin Moïse is among the many historians who write that the Johnson administration had been working on a draft resolution that would give the President the authority to take direct military action in Vietnam; the Gulf of Tonkin incident simply created the political impetus for passage of that resolution.²²

Many historians debate the culpability of key Congressional leaders in the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Linda Kerber is among the many who write that President Johnson assured Senator Fulbright that the resolution would only be used to respond to the Gulf of Tonkin incident itself.²³ On the other hand, Eugene Brown sees Fulbright as a willing accomplice, if unaware of the scope of the administration's plan to widen the war.²⁴ Fredrik

²¹ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999), 195.

²² Edwin E. Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996), xi-xii, xiv, 203, 240, 225.

²³ Linda K. Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Dec., 1997), 833-854.

²⁴ Eugene Brown, *J. William Fulbright: Advice and Dissent* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 1985), 63.

Logevall and Caroline Ziemke are critical of Congressional leaders for keeping their misgivings about U.S. military intervention in Vietnam to themselves and frequently echoing the administration's deceptions about the Gulf of Tonkin incident.²⁵ However, Ziemke does add that Senator Russell never wanted a wider war in Vietnam and believed that President Johnson felt the same.²⁶

Despite Congressional confusion at the outset, Norman Graebner and Edwin Moïse both write, President Johnson believed he had enlisted the support of the Congress.²⁷ Moïse concludes that President Johnson was deceiving himself, since Senator J. William Fulbright had explicitly dismissed the possibility of a broader war during the Senate debate on the resolution.²⁸ Moïse and Siff both conclude that Congress was not voting for the massive escalation and full-scale war that would later develop in Vietnam.²⁹

The Gulf of Tonkin incident was also central to the change of opposition strategy in 1968 from attacking the administration's use of containment to justify the war to attacking the administration's credibility. For opponents of the war in 1968, glaring inconsistencies in the administration's version of the events of the Gulf of Tonkin incident provided compelling evidence that the Johnson administration had lied to the American people, making the resulting Tonkin Gulf Resolution—obtained as a result of this incident—null and void.

²⁵ Logevall, *Choosing War*, xxii-xxiii; Caroline F. Ziemke, "Senator Richard B. Russell and the 'Lost Cause' in Vietnam, 1954-1968," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), 30-71.

²⁶ Ziemke, "Senator Richard B. Russell..." 30-71.

²⁷ Norman A. Graebner, "The President as Commander in Chief: A Study in Power," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), 111-132; Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226.

²⁸ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

²⁹ Ezra Y. Siff, *Why the Senate Slept: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Beginning of America's Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 108.

Edwin Moïse's seminal *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* provides perhaps the most detailed analysis of the Gulf of Tonkin incident itself. Through exhaustive examination of U.S. and North Vietnamese military documents and witnesses, Moïse has shown that the second attack on the *U.S.S. Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on 4 August 1964, the one that triggered the American bombing of North Vietnam, almost certainly did not occur.³⁰ Moïse does conclude that the Johnson administration, at the time of these strikes, believed the attacks on 4 August 1964 had in fact occurred. Moïse notes, however, that the administration did not attempt to investigate the veracity of the initial reports until 11 August, after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had been passed.³¹

Historians nearly universally conclude that the Johnson administration was deceptive in presenting the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident to Congress. Numerous historians—including Kimball, Karnow, Hammond, and Williams—see the administration's duplicity during the Gulf of Tonkin incident as the beginning of an ever-expanding “credibility gap” that ultimately destroyed public faith in the Johnson administration.³² Moïse writes: “The evidence presented to the public seemed to leave no room for reasonable or even unreasonable doubt.”³³ H.R. McMaster cites numerous misrepresentations in the Congressional hearings on the incident.³⁴

³⁰ Edwin E. Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996), xi-xii, 203, 240, 254-255.

³¹ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, xiv, 203, 240, 225.

³² George McT. Kahin, “Bureaucracy's Call for U.S. Ground Troops,” in *To Reason Why: The Debate about the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War* by Jeffrey P. Kimball, (Eugene, OR: Resource, 1990), 240; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 433; William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1988), 1962-1968, 106; Williams, “Vietnam,” 260.

³³ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, 203, 240.

³⁴ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 134.

Christopher Kauffman and Fredrik Logevall state explicitly that the North Vietnamese attack was provoked by the United States.³⁵

Jeffrey Helsing, Randall Bennett Woods, and H.R. McMaster all see Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara as the main culprit in the later unraveling of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, by misrepresenting the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in Congressional hearings on 6 August 1964.³⁶ Logevall, Siff, and Woods agree and focus on the numerous ways in which McNamara hid the provocative nature of the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* patrol.³⁷ Edwin Moïse notes that Senator J. William Fulbright echoed administration misrepresentations during the Senate Floor debate which he should have known were false.³⁸ Woods is more forgiving of Fulbright, writing that he was convinced by the administration's deceptions.³⁹ Logevall also stops short of describing Fulbright as complicit in the deception.⁴⁰

Moïse writes that, in 1964, with massive public support for the President's handling of the Gulf of Tonkin crisis and a resolution authorizing further escalation, the administration was committed and had to actively combat doubts about the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁴¹ Doubts over the facts of the incident were not initially widespread, but Woods writes that Senator Fulbright began to piece together the puzzle in 1966, just as the Johnson administration began portraying

³⁵ Kauffman, "Politics, Programs, and Protests"; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 197, 199-201.

³⁶ Helsing, *Johnson's War/Johnson's Great Society*, 32-33; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 134; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 76-7.

³⁷ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 77, 165-66; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 203; Ezra Y. Siff, *Why the Senate Slept: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Beginning of America's Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 21, 30.

³⁸ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

³⁹ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 75-6.

⁴⁰ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 203.

⁴¹ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 254-255.

him as a coward for his opposition to the war.⁴² Eugene Brown agrees that growing personal animus between Senator Fulbright and President Johnson was a contributing factor, outweighed only by the growing cost of the war and Fulbright's sense of guilt over his role in the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.⁴³ Woods and Siff credit only Fulbright's growing doubts about the administration's account of the incident for motivating the hearings.⁴⁴ Stanley Karnow places the decision to hold hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident after the Tet Offensive in 1968, after Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler maneuvered the Commander of Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MAC-V), General William Westmoreland, into requesting 206,000 more troops and Westmoreland subsequently denied that such a request had ever been made.⁴⁵

Woods shows that the decision to hold hearings had been made earlier. In late 1967, Woods writes, Fulbright ordered staffer William Bader to begin an investigation of the incident.⁴⁶ Woods cites the troop request incident immediately following the Tet Offensive as only creating the pretext to hold those hearings—purportedly to debate the proposed expansion of the war. Woods also describes the way in which Fulbright actually used the hearings: to highlight Johnson's duplicitous use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution; Johnson had used a resolution that Fulbright claimed was intended to respond only to the Gulf of Tonkin incident to initiate a ground war in Vietnam.⁴⁷

⁴² Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 138, 166-7.

⁴³ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 95-97.

⁴⁴ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 138, 166-7; Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 15.

⁴⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 562, 571-572.

⁴⁶ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 138, 166-7.

⁴⁷ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 164.

This study will show that Senator J. William Fulbright and staffers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee made a deliberate decision in 1967 to attack the administration's credibility on the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution rather than continuing to directly attack the President's use of the military containment of Communism as a justification for the Vietnam War or the ideology of military containment itself. This dissertation will also show that this decision was made by Fulbright and these staffers because—based on their failure to undermine public support for the ideology of containment over more than two years of opposition to the war—they believed that continued attacks on the Cold War consensus would only further alienate Americans and actually increase support for the President. Finally, this dissertation will show that this decision was made in late 1967, well before General Westmoreland requested 206,000 more troops.

For the American people, revelations about the administration's dishonesty during the Gulf of Tonkin incident simply added to grave doubts that most Americans already had about the Johnson administration's credibility—especially the doubts caused by the contrast between, on the one hand, the perceived effectiveness of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong during the Tet Offensive and, on the other hand, the administration's rosy predictions for success in Vietnam from late 1967. The American people lost confidence in President Johnson, ending his Presidency.

Both Joseph Bruce Hamilton and Randall Bennett Woods write that Fulbright's Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings were especially damaging to the President since they began in the early weeks of the Tet Offensive, at a time when many Americans had grown impatient with the war.⁴⁸ Gary Hess notes that, at the same time that the administration was

⁴⁸ Hamilton, *Faux Casus Belli*, 141, 143-145, 150; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 168.

under fire from the “Doves” of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it was also under fire from the “Hawks” of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which exposed differences of opinion within the military and between the military and the civilian leadership on the prosecution of the war.⁴⁹ Both Beggs and Brown note the impact of Fulbright’s public repentance during the hearings about his role in the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Brown saw this confession as the decisive factor in the hearings.⁵⁰ In addition to the battle with McNamara, Eugene Brown emphasizes Senator J. William Fulbright’s angry exchange with Secretary of State Dean Rusk over the “wisdom” of the Johnson administration’s Vietnam policy.⁵¹ Randall Bennett Woods concludes that the 1968 Fulbright hearings “struck a major and perhaps decisive blow” to the President’s policies in Vietnam.⁵² Ultimately, Moïse sees the Gulf of Tonkin incident as having planted the seeds of President Johnson’s destruction; questions about the incident and the cover-up to obfuscate those questions had cost Johnson the faith of “people whose trust the president needed very badly.”⁵³

The dramatic success of this new strategy—attacking the administration’s credibility rather than its use of containment to justify the war—encouraged most other opponents of the war to also adopt this strategy, permanently altering the framework of debate over the war.

Historians are largely silent on the enduring effect that the 1968 Fulbright hearings had on the debate over the Vietnam War. Edwin Moïse writes about Senator Gruening’s book *Vietnam Folly*, published later in 1968, which contained a 15-page chapter on the Gulf of Tonkin

⁴⁹ Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War*, 134-135.

⁵⁰ Beggs, *The Vietnam War Dissent...*, 241-242; Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 98.

⁵¹ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 99.

⁵² Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 170.

⁵³ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 254-255.

incident and the administration's alleged deceptions.⁵⁴ Woods and Brown write that, immediately after the hearings, views in print media were mixed about the hearings and about Fulbright's change of position on the war.⁵⁵ However, Woods writes, in the weeks that followed the hearings, reporters began to investigate the committee's allegations and "the overwhelming [media] consensus was that the *Turner Joy* and the *Maddox* had been on a secret mission in support of the South Vietnamese and that the second attack had never happened."⁵⁶

This dissertation will show that the dramatic effectiveness of this new opposition strategy—which forced President Johnson to leave the Presidential race and forced the Johnson administration to halt escalation of the war—encouraged other opponents of the war to follow suit; by the end of 1968 almost all opposition to the war was focused on attacks on the administration's credibility rather than its use of containment to justify the war. However, during the 1968 Presidential and Congressional races, antiwar candidates like Democratic Senators Eugene McCarthy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Wayne Morse still continued to attack the administration's use of the ideology of containment to justify the war. These candidates were soundly defeated, convincing nearly all of remaining opponents of the war to focus their attacks on administration credibility.

This change in the opposition's strategy—from attacking military containment as a justification for the war to attacking the administration's credibility—had a number of important consequences. First, this framework for public debate of foreign policy established in the latter half of the Vietnam War—between advocates of military intervention using the ideology of military containment and opponents of military intervention attacking the administration's credibility—

⁵⁴ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 227-8.

⁵⁵ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 170; Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 99-100.

⁵⁶ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 170.

would remain the framework for public debate after the war and be repeated nearly every time an administration contemplated a military intervention through the end of the Cold War.

This consequence has been largely missed by historians. Instead, most historians debate the existence of a “Vietnam Syndrome”—a reluctance to engage in military intervention to contain Communism—after the war. Michael H. Hunt claims that this syndrome acted to dull the public’s appetite for interventions even beyond the Cold War.⁵⁷ Stanley Karnow claims that the Vietnam Syndrome was indirectly responsible for the Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan administration.⁵⁸ On the other hand, historians such as Michael Grow and Odd Arne Westad call into question the existence of a Vietnam Syndrome by recounting the numerous U.S. military interventions in the third world that occurred long after the Vietnam War.⁵⁹

This study will show that, while the supposed “lessons” of the Vietnam figured prominently in the debate over proposed military interventions after the Vietnam War, at least as prominent was the framework for debate established in the latter half of the Vietnam War—between supporters justifying intervention using the ideology of containment and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility.

Finally, and most importantly, because opponents of military intervention stopped challenging the ideology of containment in the latter half of the Vietnam War, the American public continued to embrace the precepts of containment and the Cold War consensus survived until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. On the other hand, the Cold

⁵⁷ Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War: America’s Cold War Crusade in Vietnam 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 127.

⁵⁸ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 27-28.

⁵⁹ Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2005).

War consensus was broken amongst foreign policy leaders in and out of government, with many continuing to hold some or all of its precepts while others altogether abandoned the Cold War consensus.

For an idea so frequently cited, there is surprisingly little agreement on what the Cold War consensus actually was. Political scientists such as Benjamin O. Fordham, Eugene R. Wittkopf, and John Kane and historians such as H.W. Brands, Darren Pierson, Reynolds S. Kiefer, Randall Bennett Woods, and Robert David Johnson have described the Cold War consensus in terms of governmental processes.⁶⁰ Scholars from other disciplines—like social psychologist Milton J. Rosenberg, professor of international security studies Richard A. Melanson, and sociologist Jerry Wayne Sanders—define the Cold War consensus as both a popular social framework of beliefs and an ideology held by makers of foreign policy in and out of government.⁶¹ Historians such as Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, and Allen Barton see the

⁶⁰ Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949-51* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2001), 1-2; Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1990), 5-9; John Kane “American Values or Human Rights? U.S. Foreign Policy and the Fractured Myth of Virtuous Power,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, Iss. 4 (Dec 2003): 772-800; H. W. Brands, Darren Pierson, Reynolds S. Kiefer, *The Use of Force after the Cold War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2000), 19; Randall Bennett Woods, “The Rhetoric of Dissent: J. William Fulbright, Vietnam, and the Crisis of International Liberalism,” in *Critical Reflections on the Cold War: Linking Rhetoric and History* edited by Martin J. Medhurst and H. W. Brands (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2000), 187; Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University, 2006), xv-xvi.

⁶¹ Milton J. Rosenberg, “The Decline and Rise of the Cold War Consensus,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1981, 7-9; Richard A. Melanson, *American Foreign Policy Since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Nixon to Clinton* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 5-10, 15; Jerry Wayne Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1983), 11.

Cold War consensus as a popular social or economic consensus in favor of military spending and preparedness.⁶²

There is not universal agreement on the existence of a Cold War consensus. Political scientist Christopher Thorne and historian Aaron L. Friedberg have questioned whether there was a Cold War consensus at all.⁶³ Historians Priscilla Roberts and Gareth Porter conclude that the Cold War consensus was not a broadly held ideology, but rather a narrow foreign policy paradigm held by members of a narrow elite.⁶⁴

Arguably, the idea that the Vietnam War precipitated the collapse of the Cold War consensus was first posited in a 1972 article written for *Foreign Affairs* by Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁶⁵ Just as in defining the Cold War consensus, there is considerable disagreement over the supposed demise of the Cold War consensus. Political scientists Eugene R. Wittkopf, James Meernik, and John Kane, social psychologist Milton J. Rosenberg, and historians Randall Bennett Woods, Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, Allen Barton, Robert David Johnson, Linda Miller, and Andrew Hunt argue for a variety of specific mechanisms but all cite the Vietnam

⁶² Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2009), 126; Allen H. Barton, "Fault Lines in American Elite Consensus," *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 3, (Summer, 1980): 1-24.

⁶³ Christopher Thorne, "American Political Culture and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, (Dec., 1992): 303-330; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Why Didn't the United States become a Garrison State?" *International Security* 16 (Spring 1992): 109-42.

⁶⁴ Priscilla Roberts, "'All the Right People': The Historiography of the American Foreign Policy Establishment," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, (Dec., 1992): 409-434; Gareth Porter, "Explaining the Vietnam War: Dominant and Contending Paradigms," in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, edited by Mark Philip Bradley, and Marilyn B. Young (New York: Oxford University, 2008), 67-90.

⁶⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski "How the Cold War Was Played," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Oct., 1972): 181-209.

War as causing a collapse of the Cold War consensus.⁶⁶ Political scientists Jungkun Seo and Benjamin O. Fordham and historian Simon Hall see party politics during the Vietnam War as more causative than the war itself.⁶⁷ Other scholars, like professor of international security studies Richard Melanson and Sociologist Jerry Wayne Sanders, also believe that the Cold War consensus collapsed, but cite causes well after the end of the Vietnam War.⁶⁸

Some historians reject the idea of a collapse of the Cold War consensus. Jon Cowans and Lisa McGirr examine media and political trends, respectively, to call into question the collapse

⁶⁶ Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1990), 6-10, 174-5; James Meernik, "Presidential Support in Congress: Conflict and Consensus on Foreign and Defense Policy," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Aug., 1993): 569-587; John Kane "American Values or Human Rights? U.S. Foreign Policy and the Fractured Myth of Virtuous Power," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, Iss. 4 (Dec 2003): 772-800; Milton J. Rosenberg, "The Decline and Rise of the Cold War Consensus," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1981, 7-9; Randall Bennett Woods, "The Rhetoric of Dissent: J. William Fulbright, Vietnam, and the Crisis of International Liberalism," in *Critical Reflections on the Cold War: Linking Rhetoric and History* edited by Martin J. Medhurst and H. W. Brands (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2000), 187; Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2009), 241-242; Allen H. Barton, "Fault Lines in American Elite Consensus," *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 3, (Summer, 1980): 1-24; Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University, 2006), xv-xx; Linda B. Miller, "Morality in Foreign Policy: A Failed Consensus," *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 3, (Summer, 1980): 143-158; Andrew Hunt "'When Did the Sixties Happen?' Searching for New Directions," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 1999): 147-161.

⁶⁷ Jungkun Seo, "The Party Politics of 'Guns versus Butter' in Post-Vietnam America," *Journal of American Studies*, 45, 2 (2011): 317-336; Benjamin O. Fordham, "The Evolution of Republican and Democratic Positions on Cold War Military Spending: A Historical Puzzle," *Social Science History*, Volume 31, Number 4 (Winter 2007): 603-636; Simon Hall, "The Response of the Moderate Wing of the Civil Rights Movement to the War in Vietnam," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Sep., 2003): 669-701.

⁶⁸ Richard A. Melanson, *American Foreign Policy Since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Nixon to Clinton* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 16-19; Jerry Wayne Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1983), 12-17, 135-141.

of the Cold War consensus.⁶⁹ John Lewis Gaddis concludes that Nixon's policy of détente simply transformed the consensus rather than ending it, while Craig A. Lockard is among the many historians who note that the U.S. continued to engage in small-scale military operations to contain Communism well after the end of the Vietnam War.⁷⁰ Walter LaFeber writes that Cold War rhetoric, rather than the consensus itself, was changed by the Vietnam War.⁷¹

This dissertation rests on the findings of political scientist Eugene R. Wittkopf that the Cold War consensus was both an elite consensus on foreign policy and a popular consensus on the use of force to contain Communism. This study also supports the findings of Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, Jon Cowans, and James Meernik in showing that the Vietnam War broke the consensus among elites but that the consensus among the American public survived the Vietnam War. Moreover, this dissertation will show that the resilience of the popular Cold War consensus was a result of the change in strategy for opposition to the war—from attacking the ideology of containment and its application to Vietnam to attacking administration credibility—that occurred in 1968.

⁶⁹ Jon Cowans, "A Deepening Disbelief; The American Movie Hero in Vietnam, 1958-1968," *The Journal of American - East Asian Relations* Vol. 17, Iss. 4 (2010), 324; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2001), 8, 51-52, 85.

⁷⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University, 1982), 238-243, 271-274; Craig A. Lockard "Meeting Yesterday Head-on: The Vietnam War in Vietnamese, American, and World History," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1994): 227-270.

⁷¹ Walter LaFeber, "The Tension between Democracy and Capitalism during the American Century," in *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the "American Century"*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University, 1999), 152-82

Chapter 1 - Creating a Consensus on Vietnam

From the beginning of his Presidency in November 1963 until August 1964, President Lyndon Johnson used arguments firmly rooted in the Cold War ideology of containing Communism to justify U.S. military involvement in the conflict in Vietnam, just as John F. Kennedy had before him. Few publicly opposed these arguments or the broader Cold War foreign policy ideology of military containment of Communism on which they were based. Still, despite a concerted public information campaign by the administration to build a consensus in Congress and among the public for the direct employment of U.S. military force in Vietnam, Johnson failed to persuade the public and Congress to support a military escalation in Vietnam.

On 2 August 1964, the destroyer *U.S.S. Maddox* was in the Gulf of Tonkin supporting raids by South Vietnamese commandos (with American advisors in support) when three North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked it. The attack was turned away with one patrol boat sunk and the others damaged. On 4 August, the *Maddox*, joined by the destroyer *U.S.S. Turner Joy*, reported that it had again been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats.

President Lyndon Johnson used this incident in the Gulf of Tonkin on 4 August 1964 to justify a retaliatory air strike and to win a Congressional endorsement—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—to use military force to protect the sovereignty of South Vietnam from what his administration described as northern aggression.

Kennedy's Vietnam

President Lyndon Johnson inherited much of his rhetoric for U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam—founded in the ideology of containment—from his predecessor, President John F. Kennedy. While there were a few in Congress who were publicly skeptical, President Johnson also inherited both a press and foreign policy academia that embraced the tenets of the Cold War

consensus and supported America's policies in Vietnam. Most importantly, President Johnson inherited an American public that had likewise internalized the Cold War consensus but was barely paying attention to the conflict in Vietnam in late 1963 because it did not believe it was particularly important to U.S. security.

President John F. Kennedy's commitment to South Vietnam entailed primarily economic aid and military advisors. The period was marked by a notable lack of American public interest in the conflict, despite Kennedy's public support for South Vietnam, which was full-throated and founded on the prevailing Cold War wisdom of his day. Kennedy insisted that South Vietnam was vital to U.S. security and warned of falling dominoes should South Vietnam fall.⁷²

The Kennedy administration inherited from its predecessors the rhetoric and logic that it used to argue in favor of supporting South Vietnam, and it unabashedly echoed the justifications provided by the Eisenhower administration. One of the earliest themes the Kennedy administration embraced was that the war in Vietnam was a defense against northern aggression. For instance, in a press conference on 4 May 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk said the war "stemmed from a decision made in May 1959 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of north Viet Nam which called for the reunification of Viet Nam by all 'appropriate means'" in order to "'liberate' south Viet Nam" from the "remarkable success which the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam under President Ngo Dinh Diem had achieved." Likewise, Rusk stated explicitly that the North Vietnamese were violating the sovereignty of Laos to secure their lines of supply into South Vietnam.⁷³ In November 1961, Secretary Rusk detailed the means of this

⁷² Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 264.

⁷³ Dean Rusk, transcript of news conference, 4 May 1961, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

northern aggression—a “campaign of propaganda, infiltration, and subversion by the Communist regime in north Viet Nam to destroy the Republic of Viet Nam and subjugate its peoples.” Rusk also argued that the threat to South Vietnam was a threat to U.S. security, though he did not explain how on this occasion.”⁷⁴

At least publicly, Kennedy’s Vice President, Lyndon Johnson, unequivocally supported Kennedy’s policies in Vietnam. In 1961, when Johnson visited South Vietnam, he hailed South Vietnamese President Diem of South Vietnam as “the Winston Churchill of Asia.”⁷⁵ At the conclusion of this trip, the Vice President issued a joint communiqué with President Diem that echoed the administration’s arguments based on the containment of Communism. Johnson stated that the sovereignty of South Vietnam was “being brutally and systematically violated by Communist agents and forces from the north.”⁷⁶

Yet Kennedy did not feel so strongly about the sovereignty of South Vietnam that he was willing to commit large numbers of U.S. troops to direct action in South Vietnam. On at least one occasion, President Kennedy misled the *New York Times* into running a story reporting that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor and the Joint Chiefs did not

⁷⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, Joint Communique issues at Saigon by Vice President Johnson and President Diem of Viet Nam, 13 May 1961, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 267; A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 131-132.

⁷⁶ Dean Rusk, news conference, transcript, 17 November 1961, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

support sending troops to Vietnam. He did this, presumably, to inoculate himself against charges that he was not doing enough to support South Vietnam.⁷⁷

The foreign policy establishment, by and large, supported the administration's policy in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. In October 1954, Hans Morgenthau—an esteemed professor of international relations and author of the classic *Politics Among Nations*—had argued that France's military solution to Indochina was inherently counterrevolutionary and bound to fail.⁷⁸ As early as January 1957, Hans Morgenthau had suggested that China, by virtue of its position and size, was likely to dominate Asia.⁷⁹ However, as America's commitment in South Vietnam deepened, Morgenthau gradually began to frame the conflict in Vietnam in terms of the containment of Communism. In July 1961, Morgenthau initially questioned the application of containment to Southeast Asia, based first on the contention that it was U.S. nuclear power—rather than local forces in Europe—that had deterred Soviet aggression and, second, on the argument that the undemocratic regimes of non-Communist Southeast Asia could not muster the same popular support as their counterparts in Western Europe.⁸⁰ However, by summer 1962, Morgenthau no longer questioned the need to contain Communist China's ambitions in Asia;

⁷⁷ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 144.

⁷⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Political and Military Strategy of the United States," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, October 1954, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jordan, for Chester L. Cooper, "SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam," 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau, "New Pattern of World Politics," *New Republic*, January 1957, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jordan, for Chester L. Cooper, "SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam," 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁸⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, "Asia: The American Algeria," *Commentary*, July 1961, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jordan, for Chester L. Cooper, "SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam," 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

rather, he asked, “What is the place of the containment of China within the hierarchy of our foreign policy?”⁸¹ A month later, in *Overseas*, Hans Morgenthau defended the United States’ objective of containing Communism in Southeast Asia, claiming it was necessary to maintain the balance of power in Asia.⁸² In a November 1963 edition of *Commentary*, Morgenthau went further, explicitly endorsing the Kennedy administration’s approach to President Diem and South Vietnam—foreign aid and military assistance to South Vietnam.⁸³

Early in the war, official optimism was extremely successful in keeping Vietnam out of the headlines. By August 1962, President Kennedy could get through an entire press conference without a single question about Vietnam being asked.⁸⁴ The dramatic success of early government messages on Vietnam was largely the result of a compliant, even sympathetic press, consisting almost entirely of men who had lived through the Great Depression and World War II.⁸⁵ The American press did not question either America’s policies in Vietnam or the assumptions on which they were based.⁸⁶ The Washington press corps seldom even questioned

⁸¹ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Perils of Political Empiricism,” *Commentary*, July 1962, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jordan, for Chester L. Cooper, “SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam,” 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁸² Hans J. Morgenthau, “Foreign Policy Objectives,” *Overseas*, September 1962, 13, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁸³ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Impotence of American Power,” *Commentary*, November 1963, 13, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁸⁴ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 185-186.

⁸⁵ Louis Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency: Myths And Mindsets From Kennedy To Election 2000*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 57.

⁸⁶ Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 57; Jeffrey Record, *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), xvii-viii; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 272.

the details of the policy; for instance, when asked in early 1962 if Americans were fighting in Vietnam, the press failed to question President Kennedy's unequivocal "no," despite the fact that Americans routinely flew combat aviation missions in support of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces.⁸⁷

This deep internalization of Cold War preconceptions that drove America into Vietnam led the American press to go beyond simply accepting the official government justifications for U.S. involvement in Vietnam to actually furthering them. The American media engaged in self-censorship, keeping the most disturbing images from reaching the American public.⁸⁸ Some members of the media, such as Joseph Alsop, even criticized the administration for not going far enough in supporting President Diem and South Vietnam.⁸⁹ Correspondents on the ground in South Vietnam were not nearly as supportive of U.S. policy in Vietnam as their counterparts in Washington, but the vast majority of American publications filtered out their Saigon correspondents' pessimism before it appeared in print.⁹⁰

With the press reflecting official optimism and suppressing negative news from South Vietnam, it is not surprising that the American public wasn't paying attention to the war. When the first American Soldier died in combat in Vietnam on 22 December 1961, Americans, distracted by events in Laos, Cuba, and Berlin, barely noticed.⁹¹

Support for America's Vietnam policy was not universal. In Congress, as early as June 1962, Senator Wayne Morse was questioning America's deepening commitment to South

⁸⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 275-6.

⁸⁸ Andrew J Huebner, "Rethinking American Press Coverage of the Vietnam War, 1965-68," *Journalism History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Fall 2005): 150-161.

⁸⁹ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 149.

⁹⁰ Hammond, *Public Affairs, 1962-1968*, 23.

⁹¹ Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 56.

Vietnam. In a floor speech, Morse asked that Hans Morgenthau's article "Vietnam—another Korea?" from *Public Affairs* magazine be added to the *Congressional Record*. Morse commended Morgenthau's article for raising "some very pertinent questions to which our Government needs to give heed as we reappraise American foreign policy in southeast Asia, and with particular reference to South Vietnam."⁹² However, the article itself, while critical of the Diem regime and America's support for despotic regimes in Asia, otherwise supported many of the justifications for U.S. intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of Communism. Specifically, Morgenthau wrote, "Communist China pursues in Asia an overall military and political objective which parallels the objective of the Soviet Union in Europe. It is to remove the power of the United States from the continent of Asia."⁹³

Americans were, for the first time, confronted with the grim reality of the situation in Vietnam in 1963. The battle of Ap Bac in January 1963—in which the critical assessments from U.S. troops on the ground supporting the Army of the Republic of Vietnam clashed with the glowing assessments from U.S. officials in Saigon—thrust dire assessments of the war, for the first time, onto the front pages of American newspapers.⁹⁴ As the ruling Diem regime in Saigon came into conflict with Buddhist dissidents, the American public was next confronted with images in their newspapers and on their televisions of Buddhist monks immolating themselves to

⁹² Wayne Morse, statement on the floor of the Senate, "Vietnam—Another Korea?" *Congressional Record*, Washington, DC, 12 June 1962, 9171, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹³ Hans J. Morgenthau, "Vietnam—Another Korea?" article from *Foreign Policy*, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, Washington, DC, 12 June 1962, 9171, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹⁴ Record, *The Wrong War*, xviii; Hammond, *Public Affairs, 1962-1968*, 37; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 196-198, 201-204, 206; Hammond, *Public Affairs, 1962-1968*, 31, 34; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 279.

protest the Diem government.⁹⁵ The Diem regime only compounded the sense of chaos by first cracking down on the Buddhist dissidents and then cracking down on the foreign press corps.⁹⁶ The episode would ultimately end in a U.S.-backed coup that deposed the Diem regime and ultimately ended in Diem's death.

Yet, despite the worsening situation in Vietnam, no major news sources challenged the basic premise that the United States should be supporting South Vietnam. The media came closest in September 1963 when NBC News anchors Chet Huntley and David Brinkley directly questioned the President on the validity of the so-called "domino theory." The domino theory, first posited by Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, held that the fall of South Vietnam would lead to Communist domination of all Southeast Asia. Kennedy espoused a wholehearted belief in the domino theory and, even under cross-examination on national television, continued to support the centrality of South Vietnam to U.S. security.⁹⁷

At the same time, despite the dramatic events in Vietnam, the American public still took little notice. America was consumed by civil rights demonstrations in the southern United States and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech on the national mall. Sixty-three percent of Americans were not even paying attention to Vietnam. Those who were paying attention, wanted stronger action, as men such as Joe Alsop advocated, rather than withdrawal.⁹⁸

The reason why Americans were not paying attention to Vietnam may have been that they did not see it as particularly important to U.S. security. A White House poll on Cold War

⁹⁵ Hammond, *Public Affairs, 1962-1968*, 39; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 297, 301; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 215-216; Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 29.

⁹⁶ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 218-219.

⁹⁷ Jeffrey P. Kimball, *To Reason Why: The Debate about the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 1990), 36.

⁹⁸ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 284.

issues that concluded in March 1963 found that only 34 percent of Americans believed that it was “extremely likely” or “very likely” that Vietnam would “lead to [a] major East-West ‘Collision.’” By comparison, Berlin (54 percent) and Cuba (63 percent) were seen as the most likely flashpoints for conflict between the Communist and Free Worlds. According to this same poll, however, “Communist China” was seen as a growing threat. In March 1963, 64 percent of Americans saw China as being a threat equal to, or even greater than, the Soviet Union within the next two years. When asked about the next ten years, 71 percent of Americans saw Communist China as a greater or equal threat.⁹⁹

This same poll showed that Americans did embrace the Cold War consensus about the need for military preparedness to face the Communist threat. Sixty percent of Americans had “acute concern over National Defense, 57 percent of Americans believed that “Russia ‘wants war’ – now or later,” 67 percent found “Cold War issues ‘alarming,’” 58 percent believed that “world tensions [were] ‘almost impossible’ to relax,” and 68 percent of respondents believed “use of nuclear weapons [was] certain in a new world war.”¹⁰⁰

Johnson’s Vietnam

When President Johnson took office, he wanted to take sterner measures in South Vietnam to shore up the teetering government. To build a public and Congressional consensus in favor of increased U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam, he immediately adopted the strategy of his predecessor and began using the ideology of containment to justify intervention.

⁹⁹ McGeorge Bundy, *A study of attitudes toward Cold War issues*, produced in cooperation with Benton & Bowles Research Services (Washington, DC: The White House, 16 May 1963), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Boston, MA), accessed 24 January 2014, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-062-020.aspx>.

¹⁰⁰ McGeorge Bundy, *A study of attitudes toward Cold War issues*, produced in cooperation with Benton & Bowles Research Services (Washington, DC: The White House, 16 May 1963), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Boston, MA), accessed 24 January 2014, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-062-020.aspx>.

As the situation in South Vietnam worsened, the Johnson administration began to contemplate the means by which direct U.S. military intervention in the conflict might begin. From the beginning, the administration believed it needed a Congressional resolution of support before it could intervene, but realized that there was insufficient support for intervention in Congress for the administration to gain passage of such a resolution. The administration eventually concluded that it would need some pretext in the form of a North Vietnamese provocation before it could seek a Congressional resolution in support of U.S. military intervention.

President Johnson inherited an American public that favored the status quo in South Vietnam, but was not terribly concerned about the region. According to a Gallup poll from mid-December 1963, less than a month after the assassination of President Kennedy, nearly two thirds of Americans believed that the United States should stay in South Vietnam. But they did not believe that the conflict should be escalated; when asked, “Do you think that we should do more than we are now doing in Vietnam,” 47 percent said America should do “about the same” as it was currently doing while 21 percent said America should be doing “less.” By way of comparison, nearly two thirds of Americans supported “stronger measures including a blockade” in dealing with Cuba. When asked, explicitly, if they would support sending “more American troops to Vietnam in order to fight the communists,” if “U.S. Military authorities” said they were necessary, only 47 percent said they would approve, while 36 percent said they would disapprove and the remainder were undecided.¹⁰¹

Just days after taking office, the Johnson administration established the Kennedy administration’s practice—painting the conflict in Vietnam as part of the global struggle to

¹⁰¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 682* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, December 12-17, 1963), 9-10.

contain Communist expansion—as official government policy. A National Security Action Memo from only four days after President Kennedy’s assassination, written by National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, stated that it was the “central object” of the nation to help South Vietnam “to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy.” A key element of this strategy, Bundy wrote in the same document, was to “develop as strong and persuasive a case as possible to demonstrate to the world the degree to which the Viet Cong is controlled, sustained and supplied from Hanoi, through Laos and other channels.”¹⁰²

The President was the spearhead of this communications strategy. Throughout the first few months of his Presidency, President Johnson repeatedly emphasized that the conflict in Vietnam was the result of aggression from the north. At a February 1964 speech in St. Louis, the President blamed the war on “those that are seeking to impose the Communist system by direct or indirect aggression.”¹⁰³ In a speech in Los Angeles, that same month, he warned the North Vietnamese that “those engaged in external direction and supply would do well to be reminded to remember that this type of aggression is a deeply dangerous game.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² McGeorge Bundy, “National Security Action Memoranda 273: South Vietnam,” (Washington, DC: The White House, 26 November 1963), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), accessed 9 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam273.asp>.

¹⁰³ [Lyndon B. Johnson], speech at St. Louis Bicentennial Dinner, transcript, St. Louis, MO, 14 February 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁰⁴ [Lyndon B. Johnson,] speech in Los Angeles, transcript, Los Angeles, CA, 21 February 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Still, at least publicly, the President was not ready to commit American troops to the defense of South Vietnam. In the same Los Angeles speech, he told the audience: “The contest in which South Vietnam is now engaged is first and foremost a contest to be won by the government and the people of that country for themselves.”¹⁰⁵ This also seemed to be the President’s private sentiments. In a private phone conversation with Secretary of Defense McNamara shortly after this speech, he seemed equally reticent to send troops. President Johnson worried aloud that “[The United States] could get tied down in a third world war or another Korean action.” Instead Johnson preferred the alternative -- “to advise them and hope that they stand up and fight.” Johnson went on to tell McNamara that he believed the United States had made no commitment to send troops.¹⁰⁶

Secretary of Defense McNamara shared the President’s intent with the American public in a speech in March. McNamara said that the first of America’s objectives in Vietnam was “to answer the call of the South Vietnamese, a member nation of our free-world family.” But McNamara was careful to add that America’s role was “to help them save their country for themselves.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ [Lyndon B. Johnson,] speech in Los Angeles, transcript, Los Angeles, CA, 21 February 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jordan, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁰⁶ Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert S. McNamara, 25 February 1964, 11:45AM, Citation #2191, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁰⁷ Robert S. McNamara, “‘United States Policy in Vietnam,’ by Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964, p. 562,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D--7, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

However, the President did publicly emphasize the connection between what he called northern aggression, what he believed *were* the United States' commitments to South Vietnam, and the Communist threat that North Vietnam represented to the rest of Southeast Asia—the so-called “domino theory.” In the same phone conversation with Secretary of Defense McNamara, President Johnson insisted that the Secretary insert comments on Vietnam into a speech that the President would give later that evening to a Congressional reception at the White House. When asked what these comments should say, it is President Johnson who suggested, “I would say that we have a commitment to Vietnamese freedom. Now we...uh...we could pull out of there, the dominoes would fall, that part of the world would go to the Communists.”¹⁰⁸

About three weeks after his private conversation with Secretary McNamara, President Johnson appeared in a television interview with reporters from the three television networks. When asked by ABC's William Lawrence whether his “dangerous game” comments in his Los Angeles speech signaled direct action in Vietnam, the President rejected the possibility immediately. Likewise, when asked by NBC's David Brinkley whether the United States faced “a decision on Vietnam that's in the order of magnitude of Korea,” President Johnson again rejected the possibility of sending troops.¹⁰⁹

In the same February phone conversation in which he told Secretary McNamara that he did not believe the United States had a commitment to send troops, the President still made it clear that he believed Vietnam was part of the West's global struggle to contain of Communist

¹⁰⁸ Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert McNamara, 25 February 1964, 11:45AM, Citation #2191, Tape WH6402.21, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁰⁹ Video of television interview of Lyndon B. Johnson by William Lawrence (ABC), David Brinkley (NBC), Eric Savareid (CBS), 15 March 1964, “A Conversation with the President: The First Hundred Days,” Video #MP518, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

expansion. Johnson told McNamara that the United States had “kept the Communists from spreading” in Southeast Asia, just as it had “in Greece and Turkey with the Truman Doctrine” and with “Western Europe by NATO.”¹¹⁰

In his television interview with reporters from the three television networks, the President expressed these same sentiments to the nation. In answering questions about his comments in Los Angeles about a “dangerous game”, the President reiterated:

It was a dangerous game to try to supply arms and become an aggressor and deprive people of their freedom. And that is true, whether it’s in Vietnam or whether it’s in this hemisphere or wherever it is.¹¹¹

The President also reiterated the broader threat that Communist aggression posed to Southeast Asia, implicitly seconding Kennedy’s explicit defense of the domino theory a year earlier. He told Eric Sevareid of CBS:

I think it would be a very dangerous thing and I share President Kennedy’s view and I think it’s clear the whole of Southeast Asia would be involved and that’d involve 100s of millions of people and ...it cannot be ignored, we must do everything...that we can, we must be responsible, we must stay there and help them and that’s what we’re going to do.¹¹²

The President also harkened to a theme he would repeat throughout his Presidency—the continuity of his Vietnam policy with that of his predecessors. He told Brinkley:

¹¹⁰ Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert S. McNamara, 25 February 1964, 11:45AM, Citation #2191, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹¹¹ Video of television interview of Lyndon B. Johnson by William Lawrence (ABC), David Brinkley (NBC), Eric Savareid (CBS), 15 March 1964, “A Conversation with the President: The First Hundred Days,” Video #MP518, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹¹² Video of television interview of Lyndon B. Johnson by William Lawrence (ABC), David Brinkley (NBC), Eric Savareid (CBS), 15 March 1964, “A Conversation with the President: The First Hundred Days,” Video #MP518, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

We have problems in Vietnam as we have had for 10 years... If people would quit attacking them we'd have no problem but for 10 years this problem has been going on. I was only reading a letter yesterday that General Eisenhower wrote to the late President Diem and it was a letter I could have well written to President [Khanh] and sent out by Mr. McNamara. We've had the problem for a long time and we're going to have it well into the future...But we're a patient people and we love freedom and we want to see others preserve it...¹¹³

Later, he reiterated this theme. "We have difficulties there, and we have had for 10 years."¹¹⁴

Press outlets reporting on this interview focused on the President's invocation of the domino theory. In a United Press International (UPI) story about the President's television interview, the story proclaimed that President Johnson "subscribes to the 'falling domino' theory"¹¹⁵ (the President had never actually used the words "domino theory").

In a speech in mid-March 1964, Robert McNamara made another argument that would become a cornerstone of the administration's justification for the Vietnam War. He said that Vietnam was "a major test case of communism's new strategy," a strategy of subverting countries through wars of national liberation.¹¹⁶ A month earlier, McNamara made it clear that this "new strategy" was inextricably linked to China's involvement in the Vietnam War and the

¹¹³ Video of television interview of Lyndon B. Johnson by William Lawrence (ABC), David Brinkley (NBC), Eric Savareid (CBS), 15 March 1964, "A Conversation with the President: The First Hundred Days," Video #MP518, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹¹⁴ Video of television interview of Lyndon B. Johnson by William Lawrence (ABC), David Brinkley (NBC), Eric Savareid (CBS), 15 March 1964, "A Conversation with the President: The First Hundred Days," Video #MP518, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹¹⁵ United Press International, "Johnson Stresses Viet Nam Backing," UPI, *Palm Beach Daily News*, 16 March 1964, 1.

¹¹⁶ Robert S. McNamara, "'United States Policy in Vietnam,' by Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964, p. 562," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-5-7, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

domino theory. “For Peiping,” he said, “...Hanoi’s victory would be only a first step toward eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Vietnams and Southeast Asia and toward exploitation of the new strategy in other parts of the world.” One of America’s key goals in Vietnam, McNamara concluded, was to “prove in the Vietnamese test case that the free-world can cope with communist ‘wars of liberation’”¹¹⁷

In a speech to the National Industrial Conference Board, Secretary McNamara tied the threat of wars of liberation even more explicitly to the domino theory. He explained that the United States was giving aid to “11 nations on the southern and eastern perimeters of the Soviet and Red Chinese blocs,” who were under threat of “military aggression from without and from attempted subversion from within.” He explained that protecting these countries under the “Red shadow” was “in the interests of the United States and the rest of the free world.” Protecting the rights of the people of these countries, he concluded, “strengthens our security at home.”¹¹⁸

Central to all of these administration arguments was the principle that the Vietnam War was a result of communist aggression from North Vietnam. Officials in the administration frequently returned to this theme. For instance, Robert McNamara insisted in a speech in April 1964 that North Vietnam was the “prime aggressor...encouraged on its aggressive course by

¹¹⁷ Robert S. McNamara, “‘United States Policy in Vietnam,’ by Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964, p. 562,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D--7, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹¹⁸ Robert S. McNamara, “‘The Defense of the Free World,’ Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, before the national Ind Conf Bd, 21 May 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 8 June 1964, p. 895,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-10, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Communist China.”¹¹⁹ Adlai Stevenson, America’s ambassador to the United Nations (UN), told the UN Security Council, “The communist leadership in Hanoi has sought to pretend that the insurgency in South Vietnam is a civil war, but Hanoi’s hand shows very clearly.”¹²⁰

Secretary of State Dean Rusk introduced yet another theme in the administration’s campaign to justify U.S. military involvement in Vietnam through the ideology of military containment of Communism. Rusk tied confronting wars of liberation to the so-called “lessons of Munich,” the proposition that the Second World War had taught the world that aggression must be met early and firmly or it would continue and grow. In a speech to the American Law Institute, Rusk said that loss in South Vietnam would result in “a drastic loss of confidence in the will and capacity of the free world to oppose aggression.” He reminded his audience: “We have learned, in the course of the last 35 years, that a course of aggression means war and that the place to stop it is at its beginning.” Rusk concluded that the defeat of Communist aggression by wars of liberation would “be convincing proof that communist expansion by such tactics will not be permitted.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Robert S. McNamara, “‘United States Policy in Vietnam,’ by Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964, p. 562,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D--7, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹²⁰ Adlai Stevenson, “‘U.S. Calls for Frontier Patrol to Help Prevent Border Incidents Between Cambodia and Vietnam,’ Statement by Adlai Stevenson to Security Council, 21 May 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 8 June 1964, p. 908,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-9, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹²¹ Dean Rusk, “‘Laos and Viet-Nam—A Prescription for Peace,’ Address by Secretary Rusk before the American Law Institute, Washington, D.C., 22 May 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 8 June 1964, p. 890,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--

Congress generally supported the administration's position on Vietnam. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee J. William Fulbright did not always take a hard line on Cold War issues. In a March 1964 television interview he supported normalizing relations with the Soviet Union and rejected the "old myths" of monolithic Communism. Likewise, he supported disarmament and acceptance of the Castro regime in Cuba as a "nuisance, but not a grave threat." But Senator Fulbright still supported Johnson's policy of not recognizing Communist China or permitting its admission to the United Nations.¹²² And Fulbright was unequivocal in his support of the administration's policy in Vietnam:

There are only two realistic options open to us in Vietnam in the immediate future—the expansion of the conflict in one way or another or a renewed effort to bolster the capacity of the South Vietnamese to prosecute the war successfully on its present scale... It seems to me that we have no choice but to support the South Vietnamese government and army by the most effective means available. Whatever specific policy decisions are made it should be clear to all concerned that the United States will continue to meet its obligations and fulfill its commitments with respect to Vietnam.¹²³

While he may have had private doubts, here Fulbright seemed to have no doubt that the United States was committed to the defense of South Vietnam, either by expanding the conflict or, preferably, by supporting the South Vietnamese military through advisors.

The Johnson Administration, D-11, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹²² J. William Fulbright, "EXCERPTS FROM A STATEMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY BY SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT, March 25, 1964," transcript, 25 March 1964, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 32, Fulbright, Foreign Policy, March 25, 1964, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²³ J. William Fulbright, "EXCERPTS FROM A STATEMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY BY SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT, March 25, 1964," transcript, 25 March 1964, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 32, Fulbright, Foreign Policy, March 25, 1964, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Not everyone in Congress supported the administration's line. Senator Wayne Morse lashed out at an April 1964 editorial by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara advocating firmer action in South Vietnam. Morse warned that America would be "branded an aggressor nation," and said that the United States did not "have an iota of international law or right on our side in escalating a war into North Viet Nam." Citing Cambodia, which rejected U.S. foreign aid in 1963 but had not fallen to Communists, Morse accused the administration of adhering to a "domino theory" which he called "fallacious."¹²⁴

Still, Morse's dissent was broadly dismissed. His comments were criticized even in the news stories that reported them. Reports cited State Department claims that Morse's suggestion of U.S. withdrawal was unrealistic and that U.S. presence in Southeast Asia had acted as a shield against Communism for all Southeast Asian countries, not just South Vietnam.¹²⁵

The Eve of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident

As the South Vietnamese government became ever less stable, the Johnson administration came to the realization that it might have to commit U.S. military force to direct intervention in South Vietnam to save the government there. And almost as soon as they reached this realization, they also concluded that such intervention would require an endorsement from Congress in the form of a Congressional resolution. This resolution was also seen as an escalation in and of itself—much like the Formosa Resolution or the Middle East Resolution—that would communicate to the North Vietnamese, Communist Chinese, and Soviets America's commitment to defend South Vietnam, hopefully convincing them to cease their aggression. The

¹²⁴ A. Robert Smith, "U.S. 'Totally Rejects' Viet Nam Pull-Out," Washington, DC, *Eugene Register-Guard*, Eugene, Oregon, 10 April 1964, 16A.

¹²⁵ A. Robert Smith, "U.S. 'Totally Rejects' Viet Nam Pull-Out," Washington, DC, *Eugene Register-Guard*, Eugene, Oregon, 10 April 1964, 16A.

obstacle to these escalations was public and Congressional sentiment; neither supported direct U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam. Thus, at the same time, the administration also contemplated a strategy to convince the public and Congress to support these escalations, and they immediately turned to the ideology of containment for this strategy.

By late spring 1964, as the situation deteriorated in South Vietnam, Presidential aides began referring to “D-Day” in Vietnam—the day on which they would begin bombing the North. However, they envisioned this day as occurring after the President won the election.¹²⁶ The dominant interpretation of this period is that the President did intend to escalate U.S. military involvement in Vietnam in order to shore up the South Vietnamese government but that he did not want to escalate until after the election. In this way, he could portray himself as more rational and measured than his Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater. This interpretation suggests that the administration worked hard to keep these plans secret, until the Gulf of Tonkin incident presented an opportunity to escalate the war without looking aggressive.¹²⁷

An examination of the private deliberations of the administration in conjunction with its public pronouncements produces a different picture. The administration did want to escalate the war, and it did not move to escalate until after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. However, the administration was working hard throughout the late spring and early summer to build public and Congressional consensus for the planned escalation. It is because they believed that this effort to build a new consensus had failed, rather than because of the impending Presidential election, that they did not escalate the war. When the Gulf of Tonkin incident happened, the administration was already hoping for a North Vietnamese provocation that would galvanize public and

¹²⁶ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 194.

¹²⁷ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 195; Edwin E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996), xi, xiv, 203, 225.

Congressional support behind escalation, and they initiated two escalations that they had contemplated all summer—air strikes and pursuit of a Congressional resolution in support of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

By May, as the situation continued to deteriorate in Vietnam, the administration began to contemplate direct U.S. action in the Vietnam War, and how it might be initiated. But, despite numerous public engagements designed to convince the American public that the fate of Southeast Asia was vital to U.S. security, the administration had failed to move public opinion decisively toward direct military action in Vietnam. In fact, Cold War issues had receded in importance for most Americans, according to another round of polling conducted on behalf of the White House by Benton & Bowles in February 1964 and reported to the White House in April. Perhaps as a result of the administration's information campaign, Americans increasingly saw China as a greater future threat than the Soviet Union, by a margin of 2 to 1 (up from a 3 to 2 margin in 1963). Likewise, Cuba and Vietnam were, by February 1964, seen as nearly equal in their potential to cause an "East-West Collision," with 67 percent and 64 percent respectively. Moreover, Cuba and Vietnam were seen as nearly twice as likely to produce conflict as the next closest contender, Africa, which rated just 38 percent. Yet, concern over "cold war issues" had actually fallen behind domestic concerns (specifically "adequacy of [the United States'] educational system") for the first time since Benton & Bowles began polling for the White House on Cold War issues in July 1960. Likewise, while three out of five Americans still said that the Cold War was serious enough to give "real cause for alarm," this was the lowest level of

concern Benton & Bowles had observed. For the first time since Benton & Bowles had started polling, nearly half of Americans no longer believed the Soviet Union wanted war.¹²⁸

Moreover, this Benton & Bowles polling data was contradicted by two separate polls—one conducted by the White House and the other by Gallup—which showed that Americans were even less concerned about Vietnam. The polls also showed Americans did not think the Johnson administration was doing a particularly good job handling the situation in Vietnam. In White House polls conducted in New York, California, Oklahoma, Ohio, Indiana, and Maryland in April 1964, pollsters found that only between zero and six percent of respondents in the surveyed regions rated “handling the problem in Vietnam” as most important. In contrast, between nine and 24 percent of Americans in the regions surveyed rated “handling Castro and Cuba” as the “most important” issue, while between 15 and 22 percent rated “handling Khrushchev and Russia” as most important. And the President got poor marks in handling Vietnam in these same regions; only between 37 and 47 percent of respondents rated President Johnson’s handling of the situation in Vietnam as “favorable.”¹²⁹ A Gallup poll from the same month found similar opinions nationally. Respondents were asked, “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” Ten percent cited “Peace, war, Cold War” in their response. Nine percent cited Communism or “Communist infiltration” as the most important problem, while six percent responded that Cuba was most important and three percent specified Russia. Only two

¹²⁸ Benton & Bowles, “A STUDY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD COLD WAR ISSUES,” Information Management Department, Benton & Bowles, March 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [4 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹²⁹ Oliver Quayle and Company, “SURVEYS OF PUBLIC OPINION IN NEW YORK, CALIFORNIA, OKLAHOMA, OHIO, INDIANA AND MARYLAND, Study #154” Oliver Quayle and Company, Bronxville, NY, April 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [4 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

percent said that Vietnam was America's most important problem and fewer than one percent of respondents listed "Red China" as the most important problem facing the country. When asked specifically if they had "given any attention to developments in south Vietnam," only 37 percent answered "yes." Moreover, of those who had been paying attention to Vietnam, 51 percent said the United States was "handling affairs there...badly."¹³⁰

Yet Americans had no clear prescriptions for the administration on how to solve the conflict in Vietnam. Nearly exactly the same number of respondents (11 percent) favored "[getting] out of Vietnam," "definite military action to stop further aggression," or "[going] all the way or [pulling] out." Respondents making each of these recommendations were outnumbered over two to one (30 percent) by those respondents who simply did not know what to do next in Vietnam.¹³¹

In May 1964, the administration began to plan for direct U.S. military action in Vietnam. From the very beginning, officials in the administration thought this action should be accompanied by a Congressional resolution expressing support. The first versions of this resolution, written by National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, were much lengthier than the final version of the resolution that would be passed in August 1964. The initial version was replete with the arguments based on military containment that the administration had been using to justify U.S. involvement in Vietnam since Johnson took office. A draft version of this resolution written in May declared that the "Communist regime in North Viet Nam, with the aid and support of the Communist regime in China, has systematically flouted its obligations under

¹³⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 689* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, April 24-29, 1964), 5-7.

¹³¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 689* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, April 24-29, 1964), 11-13.

[the Geneva Accords of 1954 ending the First Indochina War] and has engaged in aggression against the independence and territorial integrity of South Viet Nam” through subversion and terror. The draft resolution also accused North Vietnam of similar aggression against Laos. The draft made a claim, which would be frequently repeated by the administration throughout the remainder of 1964, that “the United States has no territorial, military or political ambitions in Southeast Asia.” The draft resolution concluded that, because “the United States regards the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of South Viet Nam and Laos as vital to its national interest and to world peace,” the President should be given the authority to “use all measures, including the commitment of armed forces to assist [South Vietnam and Laos] in the defense of its independence and territorial integrity against aggression or subversion supported, controlled or directed from any Communist country.”¹³²

The administration also began to consider how the President would present such a resolution. Special Assistant to the President S. Douglas Carter identified four questions the White House would have to answer when presenting the proposed resolution:

- (1) Why is Congress being asked to adopt a resolution at this time?
- (2) Why do we have a national commitment to the faraway countries of Laos and South Viet Nam?
- (3) What is the present situation there?
- (4) What are our specific objectives in increasing our assistance?¹³³

¹³² [George Ball], Draft Resolution on Southeast Asia, [May 1964], Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹³³ Douglass Carter, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy describing presidential statement to accompany a proposed Southeast Asia resolution, 23 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

His answers to these questions were firmly based in the arguments the administration had been making since Johnson took office, based on the containment of Communism. The United States had to demonstrate that it was not “irresolute.” The administration was acting on precedents set by Johnson’s predecessors, who had “acted to preserve the free world’s strategic interests in Asia.” Carter suggested that the President should place this proposed resolution firmly in the tradition “starting with the Truman Doctrine to support Greece and Turkey, extending over four Administrations.” He suggested that the President conclude by reminding his audience of President Eisenhower’s words from 1959: “The loss of South Viet Nam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom.”¹³⁴

Carter also suggested that the President reaffirm that the United States sought “no military base, no territory, no special position in this area of the world.” Moreover, Carter would have had the President place the blame for the resolution firmly on the “willful aggression” of Communists who were attempting the “further extension of Communist empire in South Asia.” Carter also suggested that the President threaten North Vietnam for its aggression. “If such aggression from North Viet Nam continues,” Carter recommended the President flatly state, “it may well be necessary to make [North Vietnam]... share in the destruction and the suffering.”¹³⁵

Carter also suggested a new argument that would become a mainstay in the administration’s arsenal after the “Americanization” of the Vietnam War—that “Congress has

¹³⁴ Douglass Carter, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy describing presidential statement to accompany a proposed Southeast Asia resolution, 23 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹³⁵ Douglass Carter, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy describing presidential statement to accompany a proposed Southeast Asia resolution, 23 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

repeatedly declared support for this commitment [to Southeast Asia], both by treaty of the Senate and joint resolution of both Houses.”¹³⁶

The June 1964 draft of the proposed resolution added a new justification for U.S. involvement in Vietnam: “The loss of any of the free nations of Southeast Asia to Communism would upset the world balance of power and pose a direct threat to the security of the United States.”¹³⁷ Interestingly, this June draft also promised that the United States was willing to seek a “peaceful settlement” either “through the United Nations or otherwise” and linked termination of the conflict to UN action.¹³⁸ This June draft marked the last time the administration would make the “balance of power” argument or consider such an explicit deference to the United Nations. This commitment was never publicly stated or practiced.

Presumably because the administration had already been engaged in a concerted campaign for over half a year but had failed to create either a Congressional or a public consensus for the direct use of U.S. military force in Vietnam, discussions began in late spring 1964 about suitable conditions for direct U.S. involvement in the war. While the administration never used the word in their internal communications, they were, in reality, looking for a pretext to initiate direct U.S. military action against North Vietnam. As early as 15 May 1964, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge suggested that a “terroristic act of the proper magnitude” might trigger an attack on “a specific target in North Viet Nam.” However, Lodge

¹³⁶ Douglass Carter, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy describing presidential statement to accompany a proposed Southeast Asia resolution, 23 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹³⁷ [Unknown], Draft Resolution on Southeast Asia, 5 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹³⁸ [Unknown], Draft Resolution on Southeast Asia, 5 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

preferred that this retaliation be carried out by the Vietnamese Air Force to prevent Communist China or the Soviet Union from entering the war. Lodge suggested that the intention behind such an escalation should be to persuade Ho Chi Minh to change his behavior.¹³⁹

By 23 May 1964, these two elements—a Congressional resolution and a U.S. air strike—began to coalesce into a single strategy. Officials in the administration began to describe a 30-day process through which both air strikes and the Congressional resolution would increase pressure on North Vietnam to cease subversion of South Vietnam.¹⁴⁰

In a draft memorandum intended for the President, McGeorge Bundy spelled out this “D-30,” step-by-step approach to escalation, along with probable reactions from across Asia. Bundy began by explaining that U.S. direct military action was required to “prevent further deterioration” in Vietnam. Bundy also contended that initial strikes against North Vietnam itself might be executed by South Vietnamese, rather than American, military forces, but that “military actions would start only after favorable action on a U. S. Congressional Joint Resolution.” This resolution, Bundy proposed, would be introduced by the President in a speech on “D-30” (30 days before the initiation of military strikes) simultaneously with communication through an “intermediary”—perhaps Canada—to the North Vietnamese, that the United States’ only interest was protecting South Vietnam, not destroying North Vietnam. Bundy anticipated passage of a Congressional resolution by D-20 “approving past actions and authorizing whatever is necessary

¹³⁹ Henry Cabot Lodge, “For the President from Lodge,” American Embassy in Saigon, 15 May 1964, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 14-15, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁴⁰ Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

with respect to Vietnam.” Passage of this resolution would initiate the diplomatic and military actions to position forces in and around South Vietnam to begin direct U.S. military intervention in the conflict. McGeorge Bundy also envisioned a D-13 revelation reminiscent of the disclosure of Soviet missiles in Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis. Bundy suggested that this revelation could be an “expanded ‘Jordan Report.’”¹⁴¹ The Jordan Report, written by William J. Jordan of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council in December 1961, detailed North Vietnamese support to the Viet Cong.¹⁴² Actual military strikes, Bundy suggested, would be preceded by a demand by Khanh “that North Vietnam stop aggression” on D-10, a demand that would be seconded by President Johnson in a speech to the American people on D-3. Military action would begin on “D-Day” and would begin with extensive South Vietnamese airstrikes on North Vietnam, gradually joined by U.S. air strikes. This escalation would also prompt American diplomats to plead America’s case to the UN: that America does not wish “to overthrow the North Vietnam regime nor to destroy the country, but to stop DRV-directed Viet Cong terrorism and resistance to pacification efforts in the South” and that U.S. strikes would continue until various North Vietnamese aggressions ceased.¹⁴³

Bundy’s memorandum was the topic of a discussion on Southeast Asia on 24 May 1964, attended by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, General Maxwell D. Taylor (who would two months later step into the role of U.S. Ambassador to

¹⁴¹ [McGeorge Bundy], draft memorandum for president describing options for action in Southeast Asia, “SUBJECT: Scenario for Strikes on North Viet Nam,” 23 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁴² Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 23.

¹⁴³ [McGeorge Bundy], draft memorandum for president describing options for action in Southeast Asia, “SUBJECT: Scenario for Strikes on North Viet Nam,” 23 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Vietnam), CIA Director John McCone, William Bundy, McGeorge Bundy, and several others. Rusk resisted the idea of a Congressional resolution on the grounds that it would put the President in the difficult position of backing Khanh in the midst of his continued political turmoil and in spite of Khanh's resistance to implementing the reforms the United States was demanding.¹⁴⁴

However, much more focus was given in this meeting to the current state of American public opinion on Vietnam, what escalations public sentiment could bear, and how to increase public support for escalation. Secretary Rusk believed that no escalation should proceed until Congress and the American public were more confident of the stability of the government in Saigon. Both Secretary Rusk and General Taylor believed that the administration needed a "government-wide information program" to present a "brighter picture" of the situation in Vietnam. Rusk also believed that the President needed to directly attack perceptions in the American press that he was failing to act in Vietnam because of the upcoming Presidential elections.¹⁴⁵

In a memorandum on 25 May 1964, presumably based on the discussions during the 24 May meeting, the "D-30" approach was expanded to include diplomatic and political activities signaling escalation. The hope of author McGeorge Bundy was that the strong signal that would precede a Congressional resolution would make the actual use of force unnecessary; North Vietnam, he hoped, would change its behavior simply based on the threat of force. It was this

¹⁴⁴ Bromley Smith, "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia, Situation Room, May 24, 1964, 11:00 AM," 24 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁴⁵ Bromley Smith, "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia, Situation Room, May 24, 1964, 11:00 AM," 24 May 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

proposed course of action that was carried into the Honolulu conference on Vietnam in June 1964.¹⁴⁶

The Need for a Pretext

By June 1964, the Johnson administration had concluded that it needed to directly intervene militarily in South Vietnam if the government there was to survive. The administration had also concluded that it needed a Congressional resolution in support of this intervention. But the administration also acknowledged that, despite over six months of using the ideology of containment of Communism to justify intervention, the American public and Congress were not convinced that intervention was necessary or that the fate of South Vietnam was vital to U.S. security. Over the course of the two months, the administration would arrive at the conclusion that it needed a pretext in the form of a North Vietnamese provocation before it could begin direct military intervention in Vietnam or gain passage of a Congressional resolution.

Within the administration, there was clearly an understanding that, despite over half a year of using arguments based on the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, the public was not convinced. A June 1964 State Department memorandum outlined American's unanswered questions. The author of the memorandum, James Greenfield, noted that the Jordan Report on the war was about to be released publicly for the first time and, although the State Department believed that the report conclusively showed North Vietnamese complicity in the war, Greenfield believed this fact was already accepted by most Americans. Yet, Greenfield believed, Americans had "deeper

¹⁴⁶ Vietnam Task Force, "Chronology," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

questions” about the war. Among the questions that he believed Americans wanted answered was why the Viet Cong’s morale seemed to be higher than the South Vietnamese government’s, why the administration claimed that the United States was only providing advisors when it was clear that American troops were taking active part in the fighting, how America could win with self-imposed restrictions (including not entering North Vietnam), whether the Khanh government had sufficient public support to survive, why neutralization was not a viable alternative, and why the United Nations was not involved. Greenfield also believed that Americans were concerned that Vietnam was “going to turn into another Korean War, which will simply end in a stalemate after heavy American casualties” and that many Americans would be perfectly happy with Vietnam becoming Communist, but as “a Titoist regime” in the mold of Yugoslavia. Greenfield believed that these questions had to be answered if the administration wanted public support for more aggressive action, or even continued support for actions already underway. Greenfield concluded by recommending an aggressive public information program addressed toward these questions.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps in answer to this memorandum, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt W. Rostow was hard at work in June 1964, writing proposed Presidential speeches justifying direct U.S. action in Vietnam. On 6 June, Rostow wrote a memorandum and a draft Presidential speech listing justifications for U.S. involvement in Vietnam. As he described the speech later in an oral history, the intent of the speech was “producing a rationale for hitting the North.” Many elements of the draft speech of 6 June would appear in President Johnson’s speech

¹⁴⁷ James L. Greenfield, memorandum for Mr. Paul Southwick, State Department, “SUBJECT: Domestic U.S. Public Affairs Aspects of South East Asia Situation,” 3 June 1964, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

at Syracuse University immediately after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, justifying U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam.¹⁴⁸

Doubts whether the American public and America's allies would support a more direct U.S. role in Vietnam dominated the Honolulu Conference on Vietnam policy at the beginning of June.¹⁴⁹ By mid-conference, most participants believed that a Congressional resolution, previously seen as an escalation itself, should instead be sought to gain public support for more direct U.S. military action. However, by the end of the conference, action on a resolution was postponed until more public and international support for action could be generated.¹⁵⁰

William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, reiterated the need for more support from the American public in a 3 June 1964 memorandum to Secretary of State Rusk. Bundy wrote that the administration had failed to convince the American public of the seriousness of the stakes in Southeast Asia.¹⁵¹

By the week of 8 June 1964, a consensus had emerged within the administration that a Congressional resolution was the necessary next step before U.S. military intervention in

¹⁴⁸ Transcript, Walt W. Rostow Oral History Interview I, 21 March 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 11-13.

¹⁴⁹ Vietnam Task Force, "Chronology," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁵⁰ Vietnam Task Force, "Chronology," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁵¹ Vietnam Task Force, "Chronology," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Southeast Asia. However, a consensus had also emerged that more public support was required before the President could call for such a resolution.¹⁵² In preparation for a meeting of officials in the administration on 10 June, McGeorge Bundy prepared a memorandum in which he suggested that there were five “disagreeable questions” the administration had to answer to the satisfaction of the American public before such a dramatic escalation in the commitment of American prestige to Southeast Asia could be made. First, did the Congressional resolution constitute a blank check? Bundy believed that, because large-scale escalation (which he defined as any escalation requiring a call-up of the Army Reserves) was not envisioned, this was not a blank check. Rather, the resolution was more like “the Formosa Resolution, the Middle East Resolution, and, in a sense, the Vandenberg Resolution.” Second, what types of force would this resolution authorize? Bundy suggested that no force would be used if it could be avoided. If aggression continued, Bundy wrote, force would be “carefully aimed at installations and activities which directly support covert aggression against the free people of Laos and South Vietnam.” The National Security Advisor was adamant that the administration would not use force to “enlarge the action beyond what is absolutely required” or to “overthrow existing governments in North Vietnam or in Red China.” Third, what change in June 1964 required an immediate resolution? In response, McGeorge Bundy wrote that a detailed, “candid account of the existing situation and hazard” must be provided to the American public. Next, would no other means besides U.S. military force achieve U.S. goals in Southeast Asia? Bundy believed that a primary goal of this resolution would be to help “allies” fighting in Vietnam, and

¹⁵² William Bundy, Memo for record, “Tuesday Afternoon Session in Honolulu, June 2, 1964,” 3 June 1964, (In State Dept Material, Vol 1.), pp. 4-7, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, 33, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

additional assistance would be sought. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was Southeast Asia important enough to U.S. national interests to warrant the commitment of American forces? Bundy believed such a commitment was warranted “because of the rights of the people there, because of our own commitment, because of the far-reaching effect of a failure, and because we can win if we stay with it.”¹⁵³

Still, Bundy concluded that public sentiment had not yet been prepared for a Congressional resolution. “A Congressional resolution,” Bundy wrote, “would require a major public campaign by the Administration.” Absent a resolution, the National Security Advisor believed they could still, “within the framework of SEATO, and in defense of the agreements of 1962...plausibly move troops even into Vietnam, Thailand and Laos itself if the appropriate governments request it.” Finally, Bundy believed that a resolution had to be obtained before mid-July. Otherwise a resolution could only be obtained in an “acute emergency” or “if the situation changes drastically,” allowing the administration to “respond by emergency session.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, if a suitable public case could not be made for a resolution, some crisis in Vietnam would be required to pass the resolution.

The National Security Council met to discuss the memorandum on 10 June 1964.¹⁵⁵ Present were the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the CIA Director, Walt Rostow,

¹⁵³ [McGeorge Bundy], “SUBJECT: Alternative public positions for U. S. on Southeast Asia for the period July 1 - November 15,” 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁵⁴ [McGeorge Bundy], “SUBJECT: Alternative public positions for U. S. on Southeast Asia for the period July 1 - November 15,” 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁵⁵ [Unknown], “AGENDA FOR 5:30 MEETING, June 10,” 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

William Bundy, McGeorge Bundy, George Ball, and other key members of the President's foreign policy team. This group concluded that a Congressional resolution was necessary to communicate support for the flagging government of South Vietnam. Both William Bundy and Secretary McNamara suggested that the recent air strikes in Laos had already improved South Vietnamese morale, but William Sullivan, the Secretary of State's Special Assistant for Vietnam, claimed that negative press and negative statements about the Saigon government by Senator Wayne Morse had hurt South Vietnamese morale and that a more overt show of support was needed. Secretary Rusk objected to introducing this Congressional resolution in June, on the grounds of poor public and Congressional support. He argued: "It would be disastrous if Congress refuses to vote a resolution proposed by the Administration or if the resolution was basically weakened during the course of the Congressional debate."¹⁵⁶

It was Rusk who raised in this meeting the final suggestion from McGeorge Bundy's memorandum—that a crisis might be required before the Congressional resolution could be sought.¹⁵⁷

We should ask for a resolution...only when the circumstances are such as to require action, and thereby, force Congressional action. There will be rallying around the President the moment it is clear to reasonable people that U.S. action is necessary.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ [Bromely Smith], "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia. Cabinet Room, June 10, 1964, 5:30 PM - Southeast Asia (without the President)," 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁵⁷ [Bromely Smith], "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia. Cabinet Room, June 10, 1964, 5:30 PM - Southeast Asia (without the President)," 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁵⁸ [Bromely Smith], "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia. Cabinet Room, June 10, 1964, 5:30 PM - Southeast Asia (without the President)," 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach agreed that a crisis situation was needed, “pushing us to prompt action.” He continued: “It would [be] much simpler to obtain approval of a resolution [from Congress] if U.S. actions are forcing the pace.” Secretary McNamara was the first to suggest explicitly that the North Vietnamese might provide a provocation that would create impetus for the resolution. He suggested that “a Congressional resolution before September was unlikely unless the enemy [acted] suddenly in the area.” The group concluded—following the lead of Secretaries Rusk and McNamara—that the administration would embark on a public information campaign designed to stir public (rather than Congressional) interest in Vietnam and only pursue a Congressional resolution “in the event of a dramatic event in Southeast Asia.” There was, however, a firm realization by all attending the meeting that, in the absence of a Congressional resolution, military action in Vietnam would have to remain limited. CIA Director McCone was adamant that attacks on North Vietnam or the introduction of “U.S. troops on the ground in Southeast Asia would require a Congressional resolution.”¹⁵⁹

Recalling this period in an oral history from 1971, Benjamin H. Read, Executive Secretary to Dean Rusk, agreed that conditions had not yet been achieved for the passage of a resolution. He said: “In the summer of 1964 it first became starkly apparent that things were falling apart there [in South Vietnam] at a rate which required an enormous infusion of effort to stem or even to hold what ground was left.” He recalled a long period of contingency studies...which contemplated U. S. air strikes against the North under certain contingencies and posited various levels of response.” Read also recalled the various draft Congressional resolutions moving through the administration. However, he said, “There was just a general

¹⁵⁹ [Bromely Smith], “Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia. Cabinet Room, June 10, 1964, 5:30 PM - Southeast Asia (without the President),” 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

consensus that Congress would not be willing to give this sort of endorsement.” Hence the administration did not pursue this course.¹⁶⁰

In an oral history from 1975, Robert McNamara claimed that the administration was reluctant to stir the passions of the American public for war. He claimed that it was a “major objective of the President from the beginning” to avoid “a military confrontation with either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China.” Thus, McNamara recalled years later, “the President consciously and I consciously avoided doing anything that would have contributed to what is called here a war psychosis.”¹⁶¹

Reviewing statements by various members of the administration from this period, it seems unlikely that they had any reservations about arousing the American public in favor of more aggressive action in Vietnam. As the interagency effort focused on the effects and prerequisites for a Congressional Resolution throughout June 1964, President Johnson and others in his administration stepped up efforts to clarify America’s goals in Southeast Asia for the American public.¹⁶² In a press conference on 2 June 1964, President Johnson again painted the U.S. commitment to South Vietnamese independence as a continuation of his predecessors’ policies: “America keeps her word, we are steadfast in a policy which has been followed for 10

¹⁶⁰ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 1.

¹⁶¹ Robert S. McNamara, Interview I by Walt W. Rostow, Oral History Transcript, Internet Copy, 8 January 1975, Lyndon Banes Johnson Library, 27.

¹⁶² Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

years in three administrations.”¹⁶³ Johnson concluded that the U.S. must not “fail to do its full share to meet the challenge which is posed by those who disturb the peace of Southeast Asia.”¹⁶⁴

Despite the growing realization that a “crisis” was needed, the administration continued to try to convince the American public of the need for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Later in the month, in a National Security Action Memorandum, President Johnson appointed Robert J. Manning as a coordinator of the administration’s effort to “disseminate facts on Southeast Asia.” Johnson did so, he wrote, because he was “not satisfied with the performance of the several departments” in building “domestic understanding and support” of the administration’s “policy and purpose in [Southeast Asia].”¹⁶⁵

In a 30 June 1964 *New York Times* interview as he left office as the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge also advanced the administration’s case. He told the *Times* that “the stakes are perfectly enormous” in Southeast Asia and declared that it was “utterly unthinkable” to “get out” and “turn it over to the Communists.” And, while he recommended a range of options “short of war,” he put the blame for the conflict on “Communist aggression” and the infiltration of supplies and men from the north. Lodge also alleged that “Red Chinese”

¹⁶³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘President Outlines Basic Themes of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia,’ Statement by President Johnson at his News Conference on June 2, 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 22 June 1964, p. 953,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-11-12, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁶⁴ [Lyndon B. Johnson], press conference, transcript, Washington, DC, 2 June 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jordan, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁶⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “National Security Action Memoranda 308: Designation of Robert J. Manning to Disseminate Facts on Southeast Asia,” (Washington, DC: The White House, 22 June 1964), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), accessed 9 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam308.asp>.

were physically present in North Vietnam, assisting Hanoi in the war, furthering their plan for “Chinese Communist domination.”¹⁶⁶

As interagency discussions over a Congressional resolution continued, the State Department advanced another reason the administration needed a resolution. William Bundy wrote in a memorandum on 12 June 1964 that a Congressional resolution was required immediately to bolster leaders in Southeast Asia—especially Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos, and Nguyen Khanh, leader of the military junta in South Vietnam. Bundy was also perhaps the first to argue that the Congressional resolution itself could give the President the flexibility for further escalation, absent any North Vietnamese provocation.¹⁶⁷

On 15 June 1964, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, in a memorandum to the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense among others, expanded on the sentiments of Rusk and McNamara from the 10 June 1964 meeting. Bundy wrote that both limited direct military action and a Congressional resolution might not be feasible, based on the present level of Congressional and public support. Like Rusk and McNamara, Bundy explicitly suggested in this memorandum that an appropriate provocation from North Vietnam would break this deadlock. Absent such a provocation, Bundy suggested that any action against North Vietnam be deferred.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Special to The New York Times, “Transcript of Interview With Ex-Ambassador Lodge on His Return From Vietnam,” *New York Times*, 30 June 1964, 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

¹⁶⁷ Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁶⁸ Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures

There was firm foundation for members of the administration to doubt Congressional support for a resolution. In a phone conversation on 11 June 1964, President Johnson told Senator Richard B. Russell, one of the most influential men in the Senate, that America's "national honor" was at stake in Vietnam and that the United States had to meet its treaty obligations to South Vietnam. He also argued that America was fighting for freedom in South Vietnam and that the United States needed some agreement to guarantee South Vietnamese independence before U.S. forces could withdraw. Russell was skeptical, believing that the American people did not favor continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Russell advocated a United Nations settlement that would allow a U.S. withdrawal.¹⁶⁹ Russell continued that he never accepted the domino theory.¹⁷⁰

I do not agree with those "brain trusters" who say that this thing [South Vietnam] has got tremendous strategic and economic value and that we'll lose everything in Southeast...in Asia if we lose Vietnam. I don't think that's true.¹⁷¹

Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁶⁹ Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, 11 June 1964, 12:26PM, Citation #3681, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁷⁰ Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, 11 June 1964, 12:26PM, Citation #3681, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁷¹ Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, 11 June 1964, 12:26PM, Citation #3681, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Still, Russell acknowledged that it was extremely difficult for the United States to leave precipitously, saying the results would “be disastrous.”¹⁷²

The foreign policy establishment outside of government was beginning to openly question American policy in Vietnam as well. Hans Morgenthau, who had previously tentatively supported the military containment arguments for U.S. involvement in Vietnam and advocated at least limited containment of China, began to question this objective. In a June 1964 article in the *New Leader*, Morgenthau accused the administration of making public statements aimed primarily at “detering the enemy, hardening our friends, disarming the domestic opposition and preventing a catastrophe from occurring before November.” Morgenthau argued that the situation had changed in Southeast Asia—the Sino-Soviet split meant that containment of Communism did not necessarily require containment of China and the erosion of anticommunist sentiment in South Vietnam made U.S. objectives suspect. “The government of Saigon is lucky,” Morgenthau quipped, “when its troops just desert rather than join the Vietcong.” Morgenthau now argued that the United States should only focus on containing Communism where it hurt the Soviets or China; this was not the case, he claimed, in South Vietnam and Cambodia, both of which had deep cultural hostility toward China.¹⁷³

Nor was there uniform press support for U.S. policy in Vietnam. The *New York Times* took a mild swipe at Presidential credibility on Vietnam in its exit interview with Ambassador Lodge upon his return from Vietnam. The interviewer asked, “Do you think that the U.S.

¹⁷² Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, 11 June 1964, 12:26PM, Citation #3681, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁷³ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Realities of Containment,” *New Leader*, 8 June 1964, 13, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Government painted a fair picture of the situation in South Vietnam?” Lodge tried to evade the question and ultimately refused to answer despite the interviewer’s insistence.¹⁷⁴ Washington reporter Richard Starnes, in an editorial in the *Evening News*, reported from his recent work in Saigon that arguments claiming Vietnam to be a low-cost “laboratory” to refine anti-guerilla warfare techniques misjudged the toll on American military officers committed to the conflict.¹⁷⁵ Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist Ralph McGill argued in his column that the presence of “hundreds of thousands” of Chinese—loyal to Peking—all across Southeast Asia, combined with the localism and unfamiliarity with Western democracy that pervaded Southeast Asia made it impossible for the United States “conventionally to ‘save’ Southeast Asia.”¹⁷⁶

But these objections from the media were the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of editorials on Vietnam either supported U.S. policy or urged more vigorous action in Southeast Asia. Most editors and journalists shared the administration’s belief that it was important to contain the expansion of Communism in Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁷

And the press remained supportive despite the fact that they expected an escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. A *Time* article written days before the U.S. response to the Gulf of Tonkin attack (but published on 7 August 1964, just after the bombing), makes it clear that direct American action in Vietnam was a very real possibility.¹⁷⁸ The article described U.S. plans, under certain conditions, to support “bombings inside North Viet Nam” in the form of “tit-for-tat

¹⁷⁴ Special to The New York Times, “Transcript of Interview With Ex-Ambassador Lodge on His Return From Vietnam,” *New York Times*, 30 June 1964, 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

¹⁷⁵ Richard Starnes, “Whole Truth Untold in South Viet Nam,” Washington, *The Evening News*, Newburgh, New York, 21 May 1964, 6A.

¹⁷⁶ Ralph McGill, “Agony Without Ecstasy,” Washington, *Miami News*, 8 June 1964, 6A.

¹⁷⁷ Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War*, 100.

¹⁷⁸ Time, “Toward the Showdown?” *Time*, 7 August 1964, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,871317,00.html> (accessed 3 November 2008).

reprisals,” “general punishment of North Viet Nam from the air,” or even the “blockading or mining Ho Chi Minh's ports.”¹⁷⁹ This article was a remarkably accurate summary of the range of options that were actually being considered by the administration on the eve of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Yet two thirds of Americans were still not even paying attention to Southeast Asia in summer 1964.¹⁸⁰ The administration clearly understood that the American public was not terribly concerned about Vietnam, did not approve of American policy in Vietnam, and yet did not wish to escalate the conflict there. In internal White House polling from Maryland between April and June 1964, compiled and reported to the Administration in July, respondents in Maryland indicated that, despite heavy administration messaging on the topic of Vietnam, they were not terribly concerned about the issue. Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated that “racial problems,” not Cold War issues, were the greatest “national issues of concern.” Only 15 percent of Maryland respondents indicated that foreign relations was a concern, with only a third of those demanding the United States “take [a] firmer stand in Vietnam.” More troubling for the administration, however, was that, although 63 percent of respondents approved of President Johnson’s “handling [of] Khrushchev and the Russians,” nearly as many (59 percent) disapproved of his “handling [of the] situation in Vietnam.”¹⁸¹

This poll left the Johnson administration in a difficult predicament; Americans did not want the administration to escalate the conflict, but did not approve of what the President was

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 125.

¹⁸¹ Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN MARYLAND, Study #167,” Bronxville, NY, July 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [3 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

presently doing in Vietnam. Pollsters, in their analysis, referred to this phenomenon as “Cold War Frustrations.” What the authors of the report prescribed as the solution seems prescient in hindsight—and reflected the administration’s thinking that a pretext was needed. The pollsters assured the administration that, while voters were frustrated about Vietnam at the time, eventually the conflict would evolve to a “stage three” at which the situation would reach “a boiling point and become a severe crisis ([like] Suez, the Cuban missiles) at which time the country rallies to the support of an incumbent President.”¹⁸²

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

Since the administration took office, it had used containment to argue for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. As summer 1964 wore on, the administration began to realize that it would need to take direct military action in Vietnam if the South Vietnamese government was going to survive. It also realized that it needed a Congressional resolution to support such an escalation, to bolster flagging South Vietnamese morale, and to communicate to the United States’ Cold War adversaries that it was serious about defending South Vietnamese sovereignty. But the Johnson administration also realized that there was insufficient public or Congressional support for such escalations. The administration decided that it must have a pretext in the form of a North Vietnamese provocation to justify these escalations. In early August 1964, the administration believed the North Vietnamese had provided this provocation.

America’s road to war in Vietnam began in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the coast of North Vietnam, three months before the 1964 U.S. Presidential election. The *U.S.S. Maddox* was in the gulf supporting raids by South Vietnamese commandos (with American advisors in support). On

¹⁸² Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN MARYLAND, Study #167,” Bronxville, NY, July 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [3 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

2 August 1964, three North Vietnamese patrol boats launched an attack on the *Maddox*. The attack was turned away, with one patrol boat sunk and the others damaged. On 4 August, the *Maddox*, joined by the destroyer *Turner Joy*, reported that it had been attacked again. President Johnson responded by ordering the bombing of North Vietnam. A few days later, the Congress responded as well, with the so-called Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which gave President Johnson a free hand to answer any future Communist aggression in Vietnam.¹⁸³

A great deal has been written about the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In fact, indicative of its prominence as a proxy argument for the “legitimacy” of the Vietnam War, it is among the war’s most examined moments. While historians differ on the details, the historical consensus that has emerged over the past half-century is that the North Vietnamese attacks on the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on 4 August 1964 almost certainly did not happen and that the President used the supposed incident as a pretext to pass a resolution to widen American involvement in the Vietnam War while deceiving the public and the Congress as to his intention in doing so. Historians have shown that the Johnson administration was misleading as to both the facts of the incident and the reason for the destroyer task force’s presence in the Gulf of Tonkin that night. Finally, historians have shown that these deceptions were central to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which the President claimed as legal authority as he began a dramatic escalation of the war. Some historians go further, claiming the President was trying to provoke the North Vietnamese into giving him a pretext.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 375-392.

¹⁸⁴ Christopher J. Kauffman, “Politics, Programs, and Protests: Catholic Relief Services in Vietnam, 1954-1975,” *Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (April 2005), 223-250; Joseph Bruce Hamilton, *Faux Casus Belli: The Role of Unsubstantiated Attacks in the Initiation of Military Action for Domestic Political Purposes* (Dissertation in

However, an examination of the public statements made by members of the administration before the Gulf of Tonkin incident clearly shows that the administration was trying to prepare the public for escalation of the conflict. However, it also shows that the administration failed to build sufficient support either among the public or in Congress for more direct U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Hence, the administration decided to wait for a North Vietnamese provocation to galvanize the public and the Congress. The Gulf of Tonkin incident was that provocation.

The Incident and the Retaliation

The administration believed that the Gulf of Tonkin incident had provided just the pretext that it had wanted to begin direct U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and gain passage of its Congressional resolution. However, in its haste to exploit what it believed was a blatant and irrefutable North Vietnamese provocation, the administration failed to thoroughly scrutinize the incident or investigate the many inconsistencies in the reports coming from the gulf during the supposed events of 4 August 1964. While this oversight—and the administration’s failure to tell Congress or the American people about its doubts about the incident—would not have any immediate impact, it would return to haunt the administration in 1968.

Moreover, after the incident and the retaliatory air strikes, the administration returned to its use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin incident immediately became an integral part of this framework of containment arguments. The incident was, the administration claimed, direct evidence of the North Vietnamese’ aggressive

International Relations, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, March 2000), 136-7, 128-130; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999), 194.

intent in Southeast Asia. Likewise, the retaliatory air strikes were evidence of the administration's determination to stand up to this aggression.

If the President was looking for a pretext to retaliate, why didn't he retaliate after the 2 August 1964 attack? The generally accepted explanation is that the administration believed that the American people would not accept a retaliatory strike if the North Vietnamese had not first been warned.¹⁸⁵ George Ball's account, from an oral history from 1971, differs from this historical narrative. Ball claimed that, when the 2 August 1964 attack on the *Maddox* occurred, he, Secretary McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy were concerned that "Hawks" in Congress might force the administration to take more aggressive action than it wanted to. Because of these fears, according to Ball, McNamara suggested leaking that the North Vietnamese might have erroneously believed the *Maddox* was involved in OPLAN 34A raids when they attacked "in order to blunt the effect" of the attack and to prevent Congress from forcing a retaliation.. (OPLAN 34A was the code name for South Vietnamese commando raids on the coast of North Vietnam, supported by U.S. advisors and naval bombardment from U.S.-supplied, South Vietnamese ships.)¹⁸⁶ McNamara, in his own oral history from 1975, makes a slightly different claim. McNamara claims that he, Secretary of State Rusk, and President Johnson all decided against retaliation after the 2 August attack "because of insufficient evidence to indicate that the attacks were intentional" and, less credibly, that the administration also did not retaliate because it did not wish to escalate the war.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 202; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 72.

¹⁸⁶ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

¹⁸⁷ Transcript, Robert S. McNamara Oral History Interview I, 1 January 1975, by Walt W. Rostow, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 28-29.

Regardless of which version one accepts, the administration decided not to retaliate after the first attack on 2 August. However, the President did order the *U.S.S. Turner Joy* to join the *U.S.S. Maddox* on patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin. In his public statement on the incident, President Johnson said that the attack had happened in “international waters” and told Americans that he had ordered the destroyers to “attack any force which attacks them” and to do so “with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it.”¹⁸⁸ In retrospect, the President appears to have been setting the stage to justify attacks against North Vietnam.

In the fifty years since the Gulf of Tonkin incident, historians have shown that the second attack on 4 August 1964 against the *U.S.S. Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, the one that triggered the American bombing of North Vietnam, did not occur.¹⁸⁹ At the time, the North Vietnamese adamantly insisted that the second attack on 4 August 1964 had not occurred. In discussions on 13 August 1964 between Pham Van Dong (Prime Minister of North Vietnam) and Blair Seaborn (the Chief Canadian representative on the International Control Commission in Vietnam), Seaborn transmitted a stern warning from the Johnson administration as well as the administration’s conclusion that the North Vietnamese had conducted the attack to cast the United States as a “paper tiger.” According to an account of this meeting from the Pentagon Papers, “Pham Van Dong answered angrily that there had been no DRV provocation.” It was probably only days after this meeting that the North Vietnamese began to infiltrate the first

¹⁸⁸ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Statement by the President* (Washington, DC: Office of the white House Press Secretary, 3 August 1964), 1.

¹⁸⁹ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, 203, 240, 254-255; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 198; Ezra Y. Siff, *Why the Senate Slept: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Beginning of America’s Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 14..

organized North Vietnamese Army units into South Vietnam. At home, the North Vietnamese began to stiffen their defenses and brace for more air strikes.¹⁹⁰

Even as preparations were being made for a retaliatory air strike on 4 August 1964, follow-up reports from the Gulf of Tonkin were casting doubts that the North Vietnamese attack had occurred. Yet the administration went ahead with the retaliatory airstrike and hid their uncertainty about the North Vietnamese attack from Congress and the public.¹⁹¹ The administration did believe the attacks had occurred when Johnson ordered the retaliation; they had been convinced by radio intercepts of the North Vietnamese talking about naval operations.¹⁹²

This conclusion is supported by the recollections of members of the administration. In an oral interview from 1971, George Ball admits that there was considerable doubt about whether the attack on 4 August 1964 actually occurred at the time. He told interviewer Paige Mulhollan that Naval intercepts of North Vietnamese radio transmissions were “the only real confirmatory evidence” of the attack. Ball also revealed that “the President always had considerable doubt during at least part of that period and even afterwards.” Still, Ball said, “during the time that we were seriously considering action we thought it was genuine.” Yet he also admitted that, after

¹⁹⁰ U.S. State Department, “The Seaborn Mission to Hanoi, June 1964-June 1965,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 5-6, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

¹⁹¹ Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 82; Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 37; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 198; Randall Bennett Woods, *J. William Fulbright, Vietnam, and the Search for a Cold War Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 75.

¹⁹² Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, 203, 240; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 74.

action began, “we thought it might not be [genuine].”¹⁹³ Benjamin H. Read, Executive Secretary to Dean Rusk, agreed in his 1971 oral history that the facts of the 4 August 1964 attack were in doubt. However, Read does say that the administration reached a “consensus” that the attacks had occurred before it retaliated, though he does not say what had convinced them.¹⁹⁴ Cyrus Vance, then Deputy Secretary of Defense, in an oral interview in 1970, also said that there were serious doubts about the 4 August 1964 attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin, but insisted that he “was ultimately satisfied before the retaliation decision was taken that there was hard evidence that there had been an attack.”¹⁹⁵

Even Dean Rusk recalled that “doubts were cast” on the facts of the 4 August 1964 attacks in his own oral history, given in 1969.¹⁹⁶ However, he said:

The commander of the ship and all the intervening commanders had no doubt about it, and I was impressed with the intercept material which we picked up from North Viet Nam because my impression at the time was that North Viet Nam had no doubt about the fact that they were attacking these ships, you see. And they were the ones who would have the best means of knowing.¹⁹⁷

The radio intercepts of North Vietnamese naval transmissions on the night of the attack had convinced the administration that an attack had occurred.

¹⁹³ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

¹⁹⁴ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 1.

¹⁹⁵ Transcript, Cyrus R. Vance Oral History Interview III, 9 March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 2-3.

¹⁹⁶ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 7-9.

¹⁹⁷ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 7-9.

The President and other administration members gave no hint of their uncertainty about the events of 4 August 1964 to Congress or to the American public, either before or after the retaliatory air strike.¹⁹⁸ Likewise, the administration continued to insist that the two destroyers were operating in uncontested international waters when they were, in fact, much closer to North Vietnam, well within the twelve-mile limit claimed by the North Vietnamese as their territorial waters. The administration also failed to mention—and occasionally denied—that the two ships were engaged in unmistakably provocative behavior (supporting South Vietnamese special operations forces and gathering intelligence on the North Vietnamese).¹⁹⁹

George Ball, in his oral history from 1971, makes the unconvincing claim that neither he, nor President Johnson, knew about the OPLAN 34A raids before the Gulf of Tonkin incident²⁰⁰ (despite having admitted earlier in the same oral history that the 34A raids were a topic of conversation after the 2 August attacks). More credibly, in his own oral history from 1971, Benjamin H. Read, Executive Secretary to Dean Rusk, said that the State Department *did* know about the OPLAN 34A raids and “we had serious doubts about the wisdom of sending those.” Read also said that he recalled discussing the raids with George Ball after the 2 August attacks and the “element of provocation in those destroyers going back up there.” Read also said that he had “concern” about sending the ships into the “asserted twelve-mile limit” of North Vietnam’s

¹⁹⁸ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, 203, 240.

¹⁹⁹ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, 203, 240; Kauffman, “Politics, Programs, and Protests”; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 197, 199-201.

²⁰⁰ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

territorial waters.²⁰¹ Read understood that the patrols were not happening in uncontested international waters, as the President would claim when announcing the retaliatory air strikes.

Yet, Dean Rusk, in his own oral history in 1969, denied that the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were involved in the “coastal operations by the South Vietnamese” and claimed that the two ships were operating on the “high seas” rather than in North Vietnamese territorial waters.²⁰² This latter assertion was directly contradicted at the time by Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance in an interview with Richard Fryklund that aired on the Voice of America on 8 August 1964, just after passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Vance admitted that the North Vietnamese and Communist Chinese both “claim a 12-mile limit as opposed to a 3-mile limit.” He further admitted that U.S. ships “sailed closer than 12 miles” to the coast of North Vietnam.²⁰³

At a meeting in the President’s office with Congressional leaders on the evening of the supposed 4 August attack, President Johnson did not mention the OPLAN 34A raids to Congressional leaders when he briefed them on the impending retaliatory air strike.²⁰⁴ In fact, in this meeting, Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler emphasized that the North Vietnamese attack was unprovoked and that the United States had to respond.²⁰⁵ In an oral history, Republican Senator

²⁰¹ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 1.

²⁰² Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 7-9.

²⁰³ U.S. Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Supplementary Documents to February 20, 1968 Hearing with Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, December 16, 1968* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 10.

²⁰⁴ Helsing, *Johnson’s War/Johnson’s Great Society*, 31-33, 35.

²⁰⁵ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 198.

George D. Aiken of Vermont, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recalled that none of the administration's representatives at this meeting, including the President, shared with the Congressmen their uncertainty about whether the attacks had occurred.²⁰⁶

President Johnson first broached the topic of a resolution with Congressional leaders at this 4 August meeting. In an oral history from 1971, George Ball, the President's Congressional liaison, states categorically that the decision to seek the Congressional resolution after the Tonkin Gulf incident was the President's.²⁰⁷ Dean Rusk, in his own oral history from 1969, claimed that, at this meeting, "the Congressional leadership encouraged" the President to seek a resolution.²⁰⁸ Rusk continued:

There was practical unanimity among Congressional leaders on the desirability of a Congressional resolution, and so we had our hearings, and promptly the Congress passed the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Resolution with only two dissenting votes in the Senate.²⁰⁹

Rusk is correct that there was virtually no Congressional dissent in this meeting. Senator Mansfield did read a paper expressing opposition to war in Vietnam, but the Congressional leaders were otherwise supportive. Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was convinced by Secretary McNamara's contention that the attacks would continue if the United States didn't respond. Republicans at the meeting were uniformly

²⁰⁶ Transcript, George D. Aiken Oral History Interview, 10 October 1968, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 4.

²⁰⁷ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

²⁰⁸ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 7-9.

²⁰⁹ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 7-9.

in favor of a resolution.²¹⁰ However, the Congressmen knew that dissent would do little good; Senator Aiken pointed out to the attendees that, due to the probable groundswell of public support for military action, “by the time you send the resolution up here...there won’t be anything for us to do but support you.”²¹¹ This was exactly the effect the administration had hoped for a month earlier, when it had decided to wait until after a North Vietnamese provocation to press for a Congressional resolution.

Once the attack was launched, it was carefully timed to coincide with a public statement announcing the action.²¹² President Johnson repeated his deceptive version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident to the American people in this late-night address. In the speech, Johnson stated that the attack on the *Maddox* was unprovoked, despite the fact that the *Maddox* had been in the Gulf of Tonkin supporting commando raids—OPLAN 34A. The destroyer task force was also involved in a spy mission—called “DESOTO”—collecting radio intercepts from the North Vietnamese coast.²¹³

The press seemed convinced by these deceptions. After the retaliatory air strikes newspapers across the country were filled with glowing editorials from reporters, syndicated journalists, and former Presidents praising Johnson’s response.²¹⁴ Moreover, no one in the press bothered to investigate the President’s claims that the North Vietnamese had been guilty of provocations.²¹⁵ *Time* Magazine reported that “Two torpedo-boat attacks against U.S. destroyers

²¹⁰ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 73.

²¹¹ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 198.

²¹² McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 126-127, 135-136; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 304; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson’s Dual War*, 83.

²¹³ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 134.

²¹⁴ Turner, *Lyndon Johnson’s Dual War*, 85; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 304; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 390.

²¹⁵ Turner, *Lyndon Johnson’s Dual War*, 85.

that had been steaming in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin” had provoked the U.S. response. There was no hint of the administration’s own doubts about the second attack.

The *New York Times* also seemed convinced by the administration’s version of events. The 5 August 1964 issue of the *New York Times* faithfully reported the administration’s version of the second attack on the *Maddox*. The *Times* did note: “The North Vietnamese regime said Wednesday that the report of another attack on United States ships was a ‘fabrication.’” But this denial was little more than a footnote in a story filled with the U.S. government’s official version of the event.²¹⁶ As late as 8 August, the AP was still reporting the official version of events, which included two separate attacks against U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin.²¹⁷

President Johnson’s televised address as the attack was underway was also faithfully—and unquestioningly—covered. *Time Magazine* quoted the President as telling the American people that “air action is now in execution against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Viet Nam which have been used in these hostile operations.”²¹⁸

The press did not miss the significance of the change in policy, from supporting the South Vietnamese to directly attacking the North with American air power, either. *Time* repeatedly emphasized the significance of the U.S. reprisal to the Cold War balance of power. Evoking the specter of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Time* wrote, “In a sense, this nation had once more gone to the brink.”²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Arnold H. Lubasch, “Reds Driven Off,” *New York Times*, 5 August 1964, 1.

²¹⁷ Associated Press, “U.S. Patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin Will Be Halted Temporarily,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 8 August 1964, 12.

²¹⁸ *Time*, “Action in Tonkin Gulf,” *Time*, 14 August 1964, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,897225,00.html> (accessed 3 September 2008).

²¹⁹ *Time*, “A Measured & Fitting Response,” *Time*, 14 August 1964, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,897224,00.html> (accessed 3 November 2008).

Instead of investigating U.S. provocations which might have led to an attack on 4 August 1964, the press speculated as to why the North Vietnamese chose to attack the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy*.²²⁰ A few sources mentioned North Vietnamese accusations that the U.S. Navy had shelled their coast (the shelling had actually been by the South Vietnamese Navy, but with U.S.-supplied ships), but all accepted Robert McNamara's denials.²²¹ A *Time* article suggested the OPLAN 34A raids occurring in the area as a possible answer. "Some speculated," *Time* wrote, "that Hanoi had somehow connected the *Maddox* with recent South Vietnamese raids on Hon Me and the neighboring island of Hon Ngu." Ultimately, however, *Time* dismissed these raids as unconnected to the presence of the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* in the Gulf of Tonkin.²²²

Secretary of State Dean Rusk perpetuated the administration's deceptive version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in an interview on 5 August 1964. NBC diplomatic correspondent Elie Abel asked Rusk why it was necessary to conduct the retaliatory strikes so quickly, without first notifying U.S. allies. Rusk responded by reiterating the administration's official version of the event. The United States' ships had been attacked and "were dodging torpedoes" in "a vast expanse of international waters in which we have a perfect right to be."²²³ This was clearly deceptive. While the administration may well have believed that its ships were attacked, they also knew full well that the ships were operating inside the 12-mile limit claimed by North Vietnam as its territorial waters. Regardless, Rusk said that U.S. ships could not be expected to

²²⁰ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 228-234, 238-239.

²²¹ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 228-234, 238-239.

²²² *Time*, "Action in Tonkin Gulf," *Time*, 14 August 1964, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,897225,00.html> (accessed 3 September 2008).

²²³ Dean Rusk, "'Secretary Rusk Discusses Asian Situation on NBC Program,'" 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-16, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

“run a continuing gauntlet of torpedoes” or be “denied international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin.” When asked by Abel if the North Vietnamese believed the United States was “a paper tiger,” Rusk responded by reinforcing the idea that the United States had a commitment to South Vietnam. “They could have made a basic miscalculation about what the commitment of the United States means in a situation of this sort.”²²⁴

Given the President’s deceptions and the press’ unquestioning support, it is not surprising that the public reaction to the retaliatory strikes was overwhelmingly positive.²²⁵ A Harris poll showed 85 percent approval for the President’s handling of the crisis. A Gallup poll showed the exact same level of approval.²²⁶ Moreover, public opinion of the President’s handling of Vietnam in general had gone from 58 percent disapproving and 42 percent approving to 72 percent approving and 28 percent disapproving in a few brief days.²²⁷

The press seemed also to understand that more U.S. military action was coming in Vietnam. The AP reported as early as 5 August, the day after the air attack, that the attacks came “with this stern word from Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara: ‘Whether this will be all that is necessary is up to the North Vietnamese.’”²²⁸

²²⁴ Dean Rusk, “Secretary Rusk Discusses Asian Situation on NBC Program,” 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-16, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²²⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 390; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson’s Dual War*, 85; Helsing, *Johnson’s War/Johnson’s Great Society*, 4; Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War*, 100; Hammond, *Public Affairs, 1962-1968*, 101.

²²⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 390.

²²⁷ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 225.

²²⁸ Associated Press, “Damage Heavy; Two Aircraft Reported Lost,” *Free-Lance Star*, Fredericksburg, VA, 5 August 1964, 1.

If there was any doubt about the President's willingness for further escalation, the President made his intent abundantly clear the day after the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the retaliatory air strikes, at a previously scheduled speech at Syracuse University. The President discussed the incident and the air strikes in his speech. First, the President said the Gulf of Tonkin incident was an act of North Vietnamese "aggression" against the United States, further evidence of North Vietnam's ongoing aggression against South Vietnam and Laos. President Johnson told his audience that the United States had a responsibility to stop this aggression.²²⁹

So there can be no doubt about the responsibilities of men and the responsibilities of nations that are devoted to peace.

Peace cannot be assured merely by assuring the safety of the United States destroyer MADDOX or the safety of other vessels of other flags.

Peace requires that the existing agreements in the area be honored.²³⁰

"Peace," the President added, required that the United States stop North Vietnam's aggression.²³¹

The President concluded by reminding his audience in Syracuse of the lessons of Munich, a theme his administration had pressed unsuccessfully throughout the spring and summer 1964.

²²⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address by The President, Syracuse University, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 260," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-13-14, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²³⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address by The President, Syracuse University, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 260," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-13-14, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²³¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address by The President, Syracuse University, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 260," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-13-14, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

“The world remembers, the world must never forget...that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed.”²³² The President also returned to another theme from earlier in the summer 1964—that military containment of Communism in Southeast Asia was a continuation of his predecessor’s policies:

For 10 years, three American Presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—and the American people have been actively concerned with threats to the peace and security of the peoples of Southeast Asia from the communist government of North Vietnam.

President Eisenhower sought—and President Kennedy sought—the same objectives that I still seek²³³

President Johnson also said that this “challenge” to peace and security in Southeast Asia was “the same challenge that we have faced with courage and that we have met with strength in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin and Korea, in Lebanon and in Cuba.”²³⁴ It was the challenge of Communism to the Free World that the United States had already met with a strategy of military containment in other parts of the world.

²³² I.F. Stone, “What Few Know About the Tonkin Bay Incidents,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, Vol. 12, No. 28 (24 August 1964), 1.

²³³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by The President, Syracuse University, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 260,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-12, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²³⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by The President, Syracuse University, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 260,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-14, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

The Administration, the Congress, and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

With the administration finally having begun direct U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, it could continue to the second phase of its escalation plan from early summer 1964, a Congressional resolution supporting the use of military force to prevent Communist aggression in Southeast Asia. To justify this resolution, President Johnson and his administration used the same arguments based on the ideology of containment that it had been using to try to convince the American people to support U.S. military intervention in Vietnam since Johnson took office. In the process, they often integrated the Gulf of Tonkin incident as evidence of North Vietnam's aggressive intent in Southeast Asia. However, they omitted any mention of their doubts over whether the Gulf of Tonkin incident had occurred or their intent to further escalate the war in Vietnam.

While Senate leaders would, years later, claim that they had been deceived by the administration into passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, many of them were at least partly complicit in this deception. Senators Mike Mansfield, Richard B. Russell, and J. William Fulbright all had private misgivings about the administration's use of containment to justify intervention but did not share them. Likewise, each of these Senators knew some details of the incident that were contradicted by administration testimony during hearings on the incident, but said nothing. And, whatever the President's assurances to the contrary, the text of the Resolution clearly endorsed U.S. military escalation in Vietnam and Members of Congress clearly understood that the Resolution gave the President this power. In fact, this was the heart of its power as an insurance policy against later Congressional dissent—in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the Congress had endorsed whatever means the President chose to use to stop Communist aggression in Southeast Asia.

Right after the retaliatory air strikes, the President sent the Congress a draft of the resolution that his administration had been working on all summer, authorizing him to use force to protect the sovereignty of South Vietnam.²³⁵ This resolution was accompanied by a strongly-worded statement by President Johnson. He also recounted his deceptive version of the events of 4 August 1964. He told Congress that U.S. Naval forces were “operating in international waters.” It was in these supposedly undisputed waters that “the North Vietnamese regime had conducted...deliberate attacks.” The President told Congress that he had, therefore, “directed air action against gun boats and supporting facilities used in these hostile operations.”²³⁶ In this same statement, he made the case that this reported aggression was part of a pattern of North Vietnamese provocations. He cited attacks against U.S. reconnaissance overflights in Laos—aircraft that were present at “the request of the Government of Laos”—as further evidence of northern aggression.²³⁷ The President failed to mention that the United States had retaliated with air strikes on this occasion as well.

The President indicated that a Congressional resolution would express “the unity and determination of the United States.” He also tied this resolution to the theme, from earlier in the summer, that Vietnam was part of the United States’ broader strategy of military containment of Communism. He told the Congress that this resolution would “state in the simplest terms the resolve and support of the Congress for action to deal appropriately with attacks against our armed forces and to defend freedom and preserve peace in Southeast Asia.” Further, this resolution was analogous to other resolutions that had also been intended to contain

²³⁵ Eugene Brown, *J. William Fulbright: Advice and Dissent* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 1985), 63.

²³⁶ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Message to U.S. Congress Regarding Tonkin Gulf incidents* (Washington, DC: Office of the white House Press Secretary, 5 August 1964), 1.

²³⁷ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Message to U.S. Congress Regarding Tonkin Gulf incidents* (Washington, DC: Office of the white House Press Secretary, 5 August 1964), 1, 2 .

Communism, including Congressional resolutions passed “to meet the threats to Formosa in 1955, to meet the threat to the Middle East in 1957, and to meet the threat to Cuba in 1962.”²³⁸

The President also introduced a new argument for military intervention in South Vietnam in this message to Congress, one to which he returned frequently throughout the remainder of his Presidency. He told Congress that the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty “obligates the United States and other members to act in accordance with their Constitutional processes to meet Communist aggression against any of the parties or protocol states.”²³⁹

The President also restated the basic theme of his arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam from earlier in 1964—namely, that the war in Vietnam was part of the United States’ global strategy of military containment of Communism. Johnson told Congress that they must pass a resolution of support for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam “to give convincing evidence to the aggressive Communist nations, and to the world as a whole,” that “the United States is united in its determination to bring about the end of Communist subversion and aggression in [Southeast Asia].”²⁴⁰ Just as he had in his speech at Syracuse University, President Johnson insisted that he was simply continuing the policy in Vietnam that he had inherited from his predecessors, “consistent and unchanged since 1954.”²⁴¹

²³⁸ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Message to U.S. Congress Regarding Tonkin Gulf incidents* (Washington, DC: Office of the White House Press Secretary, 5 August 1964), 1.

²³⁹ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Message to U.S. Congress Regarding Tonkin Gulf incidents* (Washington, DC: Office of the White House Press Secretary, 5 August 1964), 1.

²⁴⁰ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Message to U.S. Congress Regarding Tonkin Gulf incidents* (Washington, DC: Office of the White House Press Secretary, 5 August 1964), 2.

²⁴¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘President’s Message to Congress, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 261,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-14-15, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

The President elaborated on four reasons for U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia that he had first proposed in a press conference on 2 June 1964. First, Johnson told Congress, “America keeps her word,” honoring what he called the United States’ “commitments.” Second, harkening to the domino theory, Johnson told Congress, “The issue is the future of Southeast Asia as a whole.” He added: “A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a threat to us.” Once more, the President assured Congress and the world that the United States’ motives for military intervention in Vietnam were pure. “Our purpose is peace,” he assured the Congress. “We have no military, political, or territorial ambitions in the area.” Finally, Johnson added that Vietnam was “not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity.” U.S. “military and economic assistance” was intended to help the “free nations” of Southeast Asia “repel aggression and strengthen their independence.” Lest Congress be confused about the source of this aggression, Johnson stated explicitly that the “threat” to these nations was from the “communist regime” of North Vietnam, which had “constantly sought to take over South Vietnam and Laos” in violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords on Vietnam and the 1962 Geneva agreements on Laos.²⁴²

To usher his resolution through Congress, the President chose the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, J. William Fulbright.²⁴³ The President assured the Senator that the resolution would be used only to respond to the Gulf of Tonkin incident itself, an assurance that

²⁴² Lyndon B. Johnson, “President’s Message to Congress, 5 August 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 261,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-14-15, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²⁴³ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 390; Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 266-267; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 203.

the Senator passed on to his colleagues in the Senate.²⁴⁴ Senator Fulbright had also been assured by National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and others that the OPLAN 34A raids were completely unrelated to the alleged attacks on 4 August. Further, Fulbright knew nothing of the DESOTO signals intelligence mission in which the destroyers were also involved. Finally, Fulbright was kept in the dark as to other U.S. provocations over the summer and questions about the veracity of the 4 August attacks because Johnson considered him at risk to leak this information to the press.²⁴⁵ Fulbright himself would say years later of the Gulf of Tonkin incident as he related it to the Senate during this debate, “It never occurred to me it didn’t happen that way.”²⁴⁶

The administration actively and intentionally deceived the Congress. Secretary McNamara dominated the 6 August Congressional hearings following the attacks, answering all but the most technical questions. In the process, he failed to mention anything about the OPLAN 34A raids that were taking place nearby the same night as the supposed Gulf of Tonkin attacks.²⁴⁷ When confronted about the OPLAN 34A raids by Senator Wayne Morse (who had been tipped off by an unnamed Pentagon staffer), McNamara vehemently denied the raids were in any way related to the attack.²⁴⁸ When asked for the ship logs, McNamara lied—saying they were still onboard when they were, in fact, already in Washington. McNamara lied either to

²⁴⁴ Linda K. Kerber, “The Meanings of Citizenship,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Dec., 1997), 833-854.

²⁴⁵ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 75-6.

²⁴⁶ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 64.

²⁴⁷ Helsing, *Johnson’s War/Johnson’s Great Society*, 32-33; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 134; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 76-7.

²⁴⁸ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 77; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 203; Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 21.

cover the participation of the ships in the DESOTO radio intercept patrols or to hide doubts about the authenticity of the 4 August attacks.²⁴⁹

Likewise, the OPLAN 34A raids played only a marginal role in the debate over the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Senator J. William Fulbright echoed the administration's denials that the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* had been involved in the 34A raids. There was no discussion at all of the raids in hearings or debate in the House of Representatives.²⁵⁰

McNamara made the unconvincing assertion many years later that "it never entered my mind that [the North Vietnamese] might have been responding to what they considered to be our attack—the covert operations—because they were so unimportant."²⁵¹ This is directly contradicted by George Ball's oral history, in which he says that McNamara suggested leaking the 34A raids after the 2 August attacks to mute the response of Congressional hawks to the attack.²⁵² McNamara clearly understood that the North Vietnamese might connect the OPLAN 34A raids to the presence of the *U.S.S. Maddox* and *Turner Joy* in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The administration's reaction to the 2 August 1964 attack on the *Maddox* reveals that other key members of the administration also believed that the OPLAN 34A raids were provocative. Communications between Secretary of State Rusk and Ambassador Taylor in Saigon, internal communications among George Ball, Robert McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy, and a handwritten note from William Bundy taken at a luncheon meeting called by Johnson all show that these officials clearly understood that they believed Hanoi had connected the 34A raids with the presence of the U.S. destroyers. Yet, after the supposed 4 August attack, the

²⁴⁹ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 165-66

²⁵⁰ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

²⁵¹ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 75.

²⁵² Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

administration denied that either the OPLAN 34A or the DESOTO intelligence patrols had been connected to the North Vietnamese torpedo attack, though they privately believed otherwise.²⁵³

McNamara was also deceptive with Congress on the matter of whether the two ships were operating in international waters. In Congressional testimony, Secretary of Defense McNamara lied, saying that the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were 30 miles from shore when attacked, an assertion contradicted soon after by Senator Fulbright, who told his colleagues, recalling private briefings on the patrols, that the ships were operating as close as three miles from shore.²⁵⁴ Why did the Secretary lie if the possibility that the ships' activities were provocative had never occurred to him?

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Wheeler was also a key player in the administration's effort to generate Congressional and public support for President Johnson's actions. President Johnson needed the cooperation of the Chiefs in order to sustain support for his policies.²⁵⁵ General Wheeler provided this cooperation simply by sitting silently, in uniform, next to the Secretary, providing his implicit support while the Secretary misrepresented the advice he had received from the JCS. General Wheeler was also duplicitous in not mentioning that the attack plans had been generated by McNamara and sent to USPACOM before the Gulf of Tonkin incident ever happened.²⁵⁶

Still, Senate leaders were not blameless; although they had misgivings about escalating the conflict in Vietnam, senior Senators such as Majority Leader Mansfield and Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Fulbright kept those concerns to themselves while actively

²⁵³ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 228.

²⁵⁴ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 30.

²⁵⁵ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 263.

²⁵⁶ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 131, 135.

supporting the administration's case for escalation.²⁵⁷ It was, after all, an election year, a factor that weighed heavily on many Senators' minds.²⁵⁸

Both Senator Richard B. Russell and Senator J. William Fulbright had been fully briefed, before the hearings, about the OPLAN 34A raids and probably understood that the raids were provocative. Neither Senator denied Senator Morse's charges to that effect. Yet, during the perfunctory two-hour Senate hearings, neither Senator objected to the administration's deceptive account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.²⁵⁹ Senator Fulbright sat quietly during the hearings while Secretary Rusk portrayed the Communist aggression in South Vietnam as a conspiracy directed from Moscow, a view from which Fulbright had publicly dissented in the past.²⁶⁰ Senator Russell even echoed the administration's position that the attack on U.S. destroyers demanded a tit-for-tat reprisal. The United States wouldn't "be entitled to the respect of other nations," Russell insisted before his colleagues, "if it accepted the acts that have been committed...without undertaking to make some response."²⁶¹

Senator Russell, also shored up two of the administration's other arguments. First, despite knowing that the destroyers had been involved in intelligence missions, Russell still rejected the notion that the United States had provoked the attack, noting that the U.S. Navy did not travel out into international waters to attack Russian ships off its own shore. Second, answering concerns expressed by a few Senators that the scope of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was unnecessarily broad, Russell pointed to "precedents for the resolution's extraordinary

²⁵⁷ Logevall, *Choosing War*, xxii-xxiii.

²⁵⁸ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 63.

²⁵⁹ Caroline F. Ziemke, "Senator Richard B. Russell and the 'Lost Cause' in Vietnam, 1954-1968," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), 30-71.

²⁶⁰ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 64.

²⁶¹ Ziemke, "Senator Richard B. Russell...", 30-71.

presidential powers in the Formosa Resolution (1954) and the Middle East Resolution (1957),” both of which he claimed had averted, rather than led to war. On this second point, at least, Russell may not have been deceptive; Senator Russell had already told President Johnson privately that he did not want a wider war in Vietnam and believed that President Johnson felt the same.²⁶²

Senate leaders also assisted the administration by abbreviating the hearings; the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was, in a word, rushed. Even when Senator Wayne Morse implored his colleagues for more time to consider the measure, to bring in military leaders that opposed the resolution, Senator J. William Fulbright insisted that it was an emergency situation and that deliberations had to be accelerated.²⁶³ Senator Mike Mansfield shares the blame for rushing through the resolution; as the Senate majority leader, it was his decision to limit debate on the floor.²⁶⁴

Fulbright and other Senators would later claim that they were deceived into passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. George Ball disputed this charge in an oral history in 1971. Ball, as the White House’s Congressional liaison—or, in Ball’s words, “the President’s ambassador to [Senator] Bill Fulbright”—coordinated closely and “spent quite a lot of time with the Foreign Relations Committee, trying to get this thing [the Tonkin Gulf Resolution] through.” On the question of whether Fulbright had been “fooled as to the intent of the resolution or its content,”²⁶⁵ Ball responded:

²⁶² Ziemke, “Senator Richard B. Russell...,” 30-71.

²⁶³ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, xv.

²⁶⁴ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, xv.

²⁶⁵ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

He [Senator J. William Fulbright] simply hadn't given the matter all that much thought at the time; perhaps didn't read all the implications into it that one might have if he'd studied it more carefully. The language was perfectly clear; it was extremely far-reaching language. But, even so, it didn't go so far beyond that Near Eastern Resolution at the time of the Lebanese invasion.²⁶⁶

Fulbright's unwavering support of President Johnson may have been a result of his personal relationship with the President.²⁶⁷ When Lyndon Johnson was a Senator, he referred to Senator Fulbright as his "Secretary of State."²⁶⁸ Personal trust led Fulbright to believe Johnson's assurances that he would not use the resolution to widen the war in Vietnam. It would also lead to Fulbright's later sense of betrayal over the Resolution, culminating in Fulbright's 1968 hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident.²⁶⁹

There were a few in Congress who dissented; Senators Ernest Gruening and Wayne Morse both voiced objections. Senator Gruening called the resolution a "predated declaration of war."²⁷⁰ Senator Morse insisted before his colleagues that "our actions in Asia today are the actions of warmaking [sic]" and "we have threatened war where no direct threat to American security is at stake."²⁷¹ Senator Morse also contested the President's version of events as early as 5 August 1964, claiming that U.S. ships had "acted as backups" for South Vietnamese vessels bombarding the North Vietnamese coast.²⁷²

²⁶⁶ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

²⁶⁷ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 76.

²⁶⁸ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, xvi.

²⁶⁹ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 76.

²⁷⁰ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 77; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 204; Robert David Johnson, "The Origins of Dissent: Senate Liberals and Vietnam, 1959-1964," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (May, 1996), 249-275.

²⁷¹ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 64

²⁷² Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 20-21.

Other Senators were less vocal but also voiced objections. Senator Gaylord Nelson objected to the sweeping scope of the resolution, while Senator George McGovern questioned tiny North Vietnam's motivations for attacking the United States.²⁷³ Senator Fulbright successfully countered these objections. Fulbright quashed Senator Gaylord Nelson's attempt to amend the measure to limit its powers by assuring the Senate that President Johnson would not use the resolution to expand the war.²⁷⁴ In response to Senator McGovern, Senator Fulbright noted that the resolution did not commit the United States to carry the war into the north as South Vietnamese leader Khanh wanted. In response to concerns from Senator Daniel Brewster of Maryland that "the resolution...would authorize or recommend or approve the landing of large American armies in Vietnam," Fulbright said that the resolution did not require it. However, Fulbright was forced to concede, "The language of the resolution would not prevent it. It would authorize whatever the Commander-in-Chief feels is necessary."²⁷⁵

The disparate and half-hearted objections of these Senators, combined with the abbreviated floor debate, certainly hindered this bloc from coalescing into a unified resistance.²⁷⁶ Senator Morse's personality alienated many Senators, preventing him from persuading his colleagues.²⁷⁷ Election-year politics—the Senators' desire not to look "soft on Communism"—was probably also a factor.²⁷⁸ However, the maneuvering by Fulbright, answering each objection

²⁷³ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, xvi; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 77.

²⁷⁴ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 203; Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 66; Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 36-8.

²⁷⁵ Brown, *J. William Fulbright*, 65.

²⁷⁶ Johnson, "The Origins of Dissent," 249-275.

²⁷⁷ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 204.

²⁷⁸ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 204; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 77-8.

and quelling Congressional dissent, was probably decisive in the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.²⁷⁹

With the exception of Senators Morse and Gruening, most in Congress did believe that the Gulf of Tonkin incident had happened as the administration described. In interviews years later, Senators Nelson and McGovern said they believed the administration's account of the events of 4 August 1964. Admittedly, the Congress chose to take only three days to unravel the incident and dedicated less than two hours of that time to hearings on the matter.²⁸⁰ But Congress had little reason to investigate the incident since the President had already assured the country he had no intention of sending American boys to fight an Asian war.²⁸¹

Whether dragged or led, Congress fell in behind the President. In the end, Gruening and Morse were the only two Senators to vote against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, giving the President a free hand to escalate U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia.²⁸² The contemporary press understood the resolution to be *carte blanche*. Both the *National Review* and the *New Republic* called the Tonkin Gulf Resolution a "blank check."²⁸³ While the Congress may have believed the President did not wish to escalate the war, the floor debate had made it clear that the resolution gave him that power.²⁸⁴

The final resolution passed by the Congress was significantly shorter than the drafts the administration had produced earlier in the summer. The final resolution began by reiterating the administration's version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. North Vietnam had "deliberately and

²⁷⁹ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 77-8.

²⁸⁰ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 13-14.

²⁸¹ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 15-16.

²⁸² Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, 100.

²⁸³ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 33.

²⁸⁴ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 33; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 204.

repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters.” The resolution then—as President Johnson had at his speech at Syracuse—tied this attack to the “deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the communist regime in North Vietnam” had perpetrated against Laos and South Vietnam, as well as the United States military forces operating in those countries.²⁸⁵

The resolution next repeated two of the justifications based on military containment that the administration had been making since Johnson took office: that Southeast Asia was vital to U.S. security and that the United States had a commitment to South Vietnam. “The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia,” the resolution stated. Moreover, the United States had “obligations” to Southeast Asia under “the Charter of the United Nations” and “the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty.”²⁸⁶

For all of these reasons, the resolution stated:

The Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Congress of the United States, “Text of Joint Resolution, August 7, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-16-17, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²⁸⁶ Congress of the United States, “Text of Public Law 88-408 [H.J. Res. 1145], 78 Stat. 384, approved Aug. 10, 1964,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: b—July-October 1964, Tab C, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²⁸⁷ Congress of the United States, “Text of Joint Resolution, August 7, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public

President Johnson believed that he had enlisted the support of the Congress. In 1967, as support for the war began to sour, Johnson would say he had pursued the Tonkin Gulf Resolution because, “if we were going to ask them to stay the whole route... we ought to ask them to be there at the takeoff.”²⁸⁸ The President added that he wanted the Congress there “at the takeoff so they’ll be with me on the landing.”²⁸⁹ President Johnson had sought a resolution because he believed that President Truman had failed to enlist the support of Congress for the Korean War. But the President was deceiving himself; he had lied to the Congress about both the circumstances under which he had asked for the resolution and what he intended to do with that authority.²⁹⁰ Senator J. William Fulbright had explicitly dismissed the possibility during the Senate debate on the Resolution that the President would use the resolution to go to war—based on assurances he had received from the White House.²⁹¹ Similarly, Congressman Thomas Morgan, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, had told the House that the Resolution was “definitely not an advance declaration of war. The Committee has been assured by the Secretary of State that the constitutional prerogative of the Congress in this respect will continue to be scrupulously observed.”²⁹² In a speech from September 1967, Senator Nelson called the assertion that the Congress had approved a dramatic escalation of the war in 1964

Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-16-17, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

²⁸⁸ Norman A. Graebner, “The President as Commander in Chief: A Study in Power,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), 111-132.

²⁸⁹ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226.

²⁹⁰ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

²⁹¹ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

²⁹² Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

“political nonsense if not in fact pure hypocrisy.”²⁹³ Congress was not voting for the massive escalation and full-scale war that would later develop in Vietnam.

But, once the Resolution was passed, none of that mattered. The administration had clearly been deceptive in its portrayal of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Members of the administration, including the President himself, gave no hint of their doubts that the attacks on 4 August 1964 had occurred. The administration did not admit the provocative nature of these patrols—a signals intelligence mission inside what North Vietnam considered its territorial waters happening in close proximity to South Vietnamese army raids supported by South Vietnamese Naval bombardment with U.S.-supplied ships. But there is no mistaking the language of the resolution. The Congress had given its advance approval to the President “to take all necessary measures”²⁹⁴ to protect U.S. military forces *and* stop North Vietnamese “aggression” in Southeast Asia. The President had his insurance policy against Congressional dissent on U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. All but two Members of Congress had—perhaps inadvertently, but still—endorsed intervention to contain Communism in Southeast Asia.

At the signing of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the President laid additional groundwork for the “tit-for-tat” justifications that would support future escalations. Reasserting the administration’s version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the President claimed that the attack had been “deliberate and unprovoked acts of aggression.” The President next asserted America’s right to respond: “The cause of peace clearly required that we respond with a prompt and unmistakable reply.” He also claimed that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution represented

²⁹³ Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 108.

²⁹⁴ Congress of the United States, “Text of Joint Resolution, August 7, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-16-17, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

“unanimity”²⁹⁵—in Congress and with the American public—in support of a military response to North Vietnamese aggression, and that that endorsement had followed “in each House...[a] free and serious debate.”²⁹⁶ U.S. military intervention was not, the President claimed, in pursuit of American self-interest. Rather, the President reasserted the purity of the United States’ aims in Southeast Asia, a claim that his administration had made throughout the summer. “In that region, there is nothing we covet,” Johnson said, “nothing we seek—no territory, no military position, no political ambition.”²⁹⁷ However, the President also made it clear that future military intervention would not be limited to responding to attacks against American forces in Southeast Asia. He added, “To any in Southeast Asia who ask our help in defending their freedom, we shall give it.”²⁹⁸

While the President had sought the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent, he also tried to use it as an escalation in and of itself, to deter the North Vietnamese from further aggression. The administration made it clear to the North Vietnamese through diplomatic channels that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution authorized the United States to use

²⁹⁵ [Lyndon B. Johnson], statement at the signing of H.J. 1145, transcript, Washington, DC, 10 August 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

²⁹⁶ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Remarks of the President upon the Signing of H.J. 1145 Joint Resolution to Promote the Maintenance of International Peace and Security in Southeast Asia in the East Room* (Washington, DC: Office of the white House Press Secretary, 10 August 1964), 1.

²⁹⁷ [Lyndon B. Johnson], statement at the signing of H.J. 1145, transcript, Washington, DC, 10 August 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

²⁹⁸ White House, Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Remarks of the President upon the Signing of H.J. 1145 Joint Resolution to Promote the Maintenance of International Peace and Security in Southeast Asia in the East Room* (Washington, DC: Office of the white House Press Secretary, 10 August 1964), 1.

force to stop North Vietnamese “aggression” in Southeast Asia. In a cable sent by Dean Rusk to the U.S. embassy in Canada on 8 August 1964, Rusk asked the U.S. ambassador to pass a message to Blair Seaborn, chief Canadian representative to the International Control Commission for Vietnam, with the intent that Seaborn then pass that message on to the North Vietnamese (which he in fact did on 13 August 1964). Seaborn was asked to tell the North Vietnamese that “U.S. public and official patience with North Vietnamese aggression is growing extremely thin”²⁹⁹ and that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution expressed:

...the unity and determination of the U.S. Government and people not only with respect to any further attacks on U.S. military forces but more broadly to continue to oppose firmly, by all necessary means, DRV efforts to subvert and conquer South Viet-Nam and Laos.³⁰⁰

Rusk also threatened additional escalations. He asked that Seaborn conclude by warning the North Vietnamese: “If the DRV persists in its present course, it can expect to continue to suffer the consequences.”³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Dean Rusk, “State 189 to Amembassy Ottawa, State 383 to Amembassy Saigon,” American Embassy Ottawa, 8 August 1964, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 30-31, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁰⁰ Dean Rusk, “State 189 to Amembassy Ottawa, State 383 to Amembassy Saigon,” American Embassy Ottawa, 8 August 1964, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 30-31, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁰¹ Dean Rusk, “State 189 to Amembassy Ottawa, State 383 to Amembassy Saigon,” American Embassy Ottawa, 8 August 1964, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 30-31, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

After the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

After the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the administration continued to use the ideology of containment of Communism to build support for further U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The administration also used the Gulf of Tonkin incident as evidence of North Vietnamese aggression and the administration's retaliatory airstrikes as evidence of the administration's firmness in the face of aggression. However, in the heat of a Presidential race against Republican challenger, Senator Barry Goldwater, the President also painted this retaliation as "measured" to contrast it against the statements Goldwater had made about his intent to stop Communist aggression using more extreme measures.

In an oral history from 1971, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance denied that the administration was seeking "a regular policy of retaliating for particular North Vietnamese" attacks in late summer 1964. Instead, he claimed that the retaliatory air strikes following the Gulf of Tonkin incident were "a one-shot affair determined by the incident that occurred and the facts that surrounded it." They were not, he continued, "a determination of a policy."³⁰²

But, unmistakably, the President was already contemplating more escalations. In a meeting of officials from the administration on 10 August 1964 at which the President, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Wheeler, and others were present, Rusk suggested that the OPLAN 34A raids and DESOTO patrols should be suspended so that "responsibility for escalation" would remain "on the other side." The President was happy with the Congressional and public response to the retaliation. However, he warned that the administration could not fail "in the second challenge," a subsequent North Vietnamese provocation. He said that if the

³⁰² Transcript, Cyrus R. Vance Oral History Interview III, 9 March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 3-5.

United States “should do nothing further,” it would find itself “even worse off than before” the Gulf of Tonkin incident. “Instead of letting the other side have the ball,” the President said, the administration “should be prepared to take it.” The President asked for “prompt study and recommendations” on further escalations that might be accomplished “with maximum results and minimum danger.”³⁰³

The State Department provided these recommendations three days later. In a memorandum from 13 August 1964, William Bundy suggested continuing air strikes in Laos but suspending OPLAN 34A raids and DESOTO patrols in order to “avoid actions that would in any way take the onus off the Communist side for escalation.” Bundy plainly understood that the North Vietnamese had reasonably associated the DESOTO patrols with the OPLAN 34A raids; he said that, should the DESOTO patrols be resumed, “both for present purposes and to maintain the credibility of our account of the events of last week, they must be clearly dissociated from 34A operations both in fact and in physical appearance.” This memorandum also makes clear that Bundy plainly understood that travelling inside the 12-mile limit claimed by the North Vietnamese as their territorial waters was provocative. He suggested that, if DESOTO patrols resumed, they should be held at least 20 miles off shore and that they should “avoid penetrations of 11 miles or so.” Ultimately, however, the resumption of DESOTO patrols *was* intended as a provocation. Bundy concluded: “the 20-mile distance would not appreciably change the chances

³⁰³ McGeorge Bundy, memorandum for record, “August 10, 1964, 12:35 PM - Meeting in Cabinet Room,” 10 August 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

of a North Vietnamese reaction, while it would deprive them of a propaganda argument (since a great many other countries also assert a 12-mile territorial waters limit.)”³⁰⁴

The State Department also had ideas for new escalations, “tit-for-tat actions of opportunity” awaiting only “special VC or DRV activity.” William P. Bundy suggested that, if the Viet Cong were to escalate with thus far “‘unused dirty tricks’ such as mining (or attacks) in the Saigon River, sabotage of major POL stocks, and terrorist attacks on U.S. dependents,” the United States should respond with further escalations of attacks inside North Vietnam, “prompt and precise reprisal[s]” such as “mining the Haiphong channel and attacking the Haiphong POL”³⁰⁵

As the State Department and the White House continued to formulate recommendations, the President continued to lay the foundations for “tit-for-tat” justifications for future escalations. In a 12 August 1964 speech to the American Bar Association in New York City, the President said: “No one should think for a moment that we will be worn down, nor will we be driven out.” But, at the same time, he emphasized that future escalations would be limited. “We will not be provoked into rashness,” he told the audience. “We will continue to meet aggression with firmness and unprovoked attack with measured reply,” just as the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* had in the Gulf of Tonkin and the administration had with air strikes against torpedo boat installations in North Vietnam. President Johnson concluded by reminding his audience of his authority from Congress to continue to meet North Vietnamese provocations—and equated this Congressional

³⁰⁴ William P. Bundy, Third Draft, “NEXT COURSES OF ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA,” 13 August 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³⁰⁵ William P. Bundy, Third Draft, “NEXT COURSES OF ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA,” 13 August 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

authorization with the approval of the American people. “That is the meaning of the resolution passed by your Congress with 502 votes in favor and only 2 opposed. That is the meaning of the national unity that we have shown to all the world last week.”³⁰⁶

In arguing for U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia, the President also drew once again on two ideas derived from U.S. military containment that his administration had used since he took office—that the U.S. military was protecting free people from Communist aggression and that this policy was a continuation of his predecessors’ policies. Johnson insisted that U.S. military presence in South Vietnam was absolutely necessary to contain Communist expansion. Withdrawing that support, Johnson said, would be to “allow the freedom of brave people to be handed over to Communist tyranny.” Such an act, Johnson concluded, was “strategically unwise” and “morally unthinkable.”³⁰⁷ This policy was, Johnson also insisted, the “one consistent aim” of his predecessors, “for ten years through the Eisenhower Administration, the Kennedy Administration, and this Administration.” While he admitted that “the South Vietnamese have the basic responsibility” for their own defense, he also assured Americans that the United States would “engage our strength and our resources to whatever extent needed to help others repel aggression.”³⁰⁸

The White House held a strategy meeting on 7 September 1964, after the return of the newly confirmed U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, General Maxwell Taylor, from Southeast

³⁰⁶ Lyndon Banes Johnson, President’s Remarks at the American Bar Association, New York City, 12 August 1964, National Security File: Speech File, Box 1, Lyndon Banes Johnson Library, Austin, TX.

³⁰⁷ Lyndon Banes Johnson, President’s Remarks at the American Bar Association, New York City, 12 August 1964, National Security File: Speech File, Box 1, Lyndon Banes Johnson Library, Austin, TX.

³⁰⁸ [Lyndon B. Johnson], speech to Convention of the American Bar Association, transcript, New York, 12 August 1964, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Asia. According to an account of this meeting from the Pentagon Papers, both civilian and military leadership from the Defense Department favored an immediate “escalatory air campaign against the North.” However, this course of action was opposed by the CIA, Department of State, and advisors in the White House for fear that the South Vietnamese government could not withstand the counter-escalation by North Vietnam. The attendees at the meeting concluded that the original recommendations from McGeorge Bundy, beginning with the resumption of DESOTO patrols, were the most prudent course. But the group also concluded that the United States should be postured to “respond to any future DRV attacks on U.S. units on a tit-for-tat basis.”³⁰⁹

On 10 September 1964, these recommendations became official U.S. policy. A National Security Action Memorandum directed the resumption of DESOTO patrols, followed by the resumption of OPLAN 34A raids. The President directed the administration to “be prepared to respond as appropriate against the DRV in the event of any attack on U.S. units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN.”³¹⁰ The government was poised to retaliate in a “tit-for-tat” fashion as soon another North Vietnamese provocation occurred.

Early in the following month, at a Democratic Party fundraising dinner in New Orleans, the President himself again used U.S. the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Harking back to the founders of containment,

³⁰⁹ Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: B, Military Pressures Against NVN, July - October 1964, 7-8, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³¹⁰ McGeorge Bundy, “National Security Action Memorandum 314: Resumption of Operations in SEA,” (Washington, DC: The White House, 10 September 1964), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), accessed 9 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam314.asp>.

President Johnson reminded his audience that “in the Truman doctrine and the Marshall plan of 1948 we made our commitment against the spread of communism.” This commitment, Johnson claimed, had proved wrong those who argued “that communism would be irresistible” or “that war would be unavoidable.” Johnson reminded his audience that his was the first administration “since midcentury under which no Nation in the world has fallen to communism.” Johnson cited his firm but restrained reply to repeated provocations from the Communist World, including in the Gulf of Tonkin, where, Johnson said “we made a prompt reply, an appropriate reply. But we have never lost our heart and I hope we will never lose our head.” But, expanding the lessons of Munich, he warned any “would-be conqueror” not to mistake U.S. resolve as Kaiser Wilhelm had in World War I or Adolf Hitler had in World War II. Perhaps in a thinly-veiled jab at the two Senators who had voted against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—Senators Morse and Gruening—Johnson added that Hitler had been “fooled” into his aggression “because a few Senators were preaching isolationism.”³¹¹

Few in the media were publicly questioning the administration’s account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident or the administration’s use of the theory of military containment to justify further escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. I.F. Stone, in his newsletter the *I.F. Stone Weekly*, recalled the objections that Senator Wayne Morse had raised during the abbreviated hearings and floor debate on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Morse had called our retaliation a “crime,” Stone wrote.³¹² Stone added:

³¹¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner in New Orleans, October 9, 1964,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64*. Volume II, entry 648 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 1281-1288, accessed 3 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/november-1963-1964/10-09-1964.html>.

³¹² I.F. Stone, “What Few Know About the Tonkin Bay Incidents,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, Vol. 12, No. 28 (24 August 1964), 2.

Morse revealed that U.S. warships were on patrol in Tonkin Bay nearby during the shelling of two islands off the North Vietnamese coast on Friday, July 31, by South Vietnamese vessels. Morse said our warships were within 3 to 11 miles of North Vietnamese territory, at the time, although North Vietnam claims a 12-mile limit.³¹³

James “Scotty” Reston, then associate editor at the *New York Times*, was one of the few in the media to challenge the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to argue for further military intervention in Vietnam. He wrote that both “President Johnson and Senator Goldwater are now following the domino theory about Vietnam.” He asked three pointed questions about the administration’s assertion that defending South Vietnam “is ‘vital’ to the security of the U.S.”³¹⁴

Is this true? And if it is, can raising the stakes in the war be “controlled,” as the Pentagon is so fond of saying? It would also be interesting to know whether President Johnson and Senator Goldwater propose to go on getting the United States involved in every tribal conflict in Africa and Asia.³¹⁵

He concluded by criticizing the fact that the United States was increasing its “commitments there [in Vietnam] without agreeing within the Government about our objectives in that conflict.”³¹⁶

The Gulf of Tonkin incident and the administration response had moved public opinion a bit, but not decisively, in favor of intervention in Vietnam. Internal White House polling in

³¹³ I.F. Stone, “What Few Know About the Tonkin Bay Incidents,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, Vol. 12, No. 28 (24 August 1964), 2.

³¹⁴ James “Scotty” Reston, “Washington: The Unresolved Questions of the Campaign,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1964, E10, *New York Times* (1923-Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

³¹⁵ James “Scotty” Reston, “Washington: The Unresolved Questions of the Campaign,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1964, E10, *New York Times* (1923-Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

³¹⁶ James “Scotty” Reston, “Washington: The Unresolved Questions of the Campaign,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1964, E10, *New York Times* (1923-Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Kentucky from September and October 1964 showed that Kentuckians, like their counterparts nationally, continued to see Vietnam as a less important issue than domestic concerns. In mid-October, only 10 percent considered “handling the problem in Vietnam” as “most important” while 16 percent considered “providing jobs,” 21 percent considered “handling integration and segregation,” and 26 percent considered “the war on poverty” to be “most important.” More promising for the administration, however, were some new polling results. In September, 58 percent of Kentuckians expressed a favorable opinion of the President’s handling of Vietnam (though that favorable rating would slip to 50 percent by mid-October).³¹⁷

Perhaps most important for the Johnson administration on the eve of the election, voters thought Johnson better than Goldwater to deal with international issues. Kentuckians favored Johnson in both handling “Communist China” (63 percent to 17 percent) and “handling the Russians” (62 percent to 16 percent).³¹⁸ In their analysis, the poll’s authors suggested that the Johnson administration should exploit the President’s strength on Cold War Issues. They wrote:

We do advocate that he [President Johnson] start reminding the electorate of some of the specific irresponsible statements made by Goldwater on foreign policy. He can talk about the statement about sending the Marines into Cuba to turn on the water and reckless attacks on our preparedness. Barry Goldwater still scares people...speechwriters should make prolific use of Goldwater quotes on foreign policy.³¹⁹ [Emphases in the original document.]

³¹⁷ Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN KENTUCKY, Wave III, Study #213,” Bronxville, NY, October 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [2 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³¹⁸ Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN KENTUCKY, Wave III, Study #213,” Bronxville, NY, October 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [2 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³¹⁹ Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN KENTUCKY, Wave III, Study #213,” Bronxville, NY, October 1964, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [2 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Johnson's campaign clearly took this advice to heart. A 30-minute television advertisement for President Johnson that aired on 15 October 1964, just days before the election, highlighted Goldwater's more militant views on the United States' global competition with the Communist World. The ad began with a speech by President Johnson, commemorating the one-year anniversary of the above-ground nuclear test ban treaty. The President reminded his audience that "a few lonely voices were raised in opposition." Lest someone not understand that he was referring to Senator Barry Goldwater, the President continued: "Among them was one who now seeks to lead this nation." The President said that Goldwater's position on Cold War issues, "[opposing] efforts to reach peaceful agreements," was a prescription for the "continued...upward spiral of tension and danger and the contamination of the world around us."³²⁰

Johnson painted his own policies as a continuation of "the policy of every American president of both parties for the last 20 years."³²¹ Artfully, the President simultaneously reminded the audience of his response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, tied that response to both the military containment of Communism and his predecessor's policies, and posited that it was the United States obligation to continue those policies:

We will stand firm in the defense of freedom, as President Kennedy did in Cuba, as we did when our destroyers were attacked around Vietnam. We will continue to serve notice to all the world: wherever liberty comes under fire, America will be there

³²⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech", Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, "Quest for Peace," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³²¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech", Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, "Quest for Peace," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

too, swiftly, decisively, and ready to make any sacrifice to make appropriate reply.³²²

Johnson returned to this idea at the end of his speech. The United States had been “the guardian at the gate of freedom” for 20 years, building U.S. military might so that America was the “greatest military power on earth.” Moreover, the President recounted the ways he and his predecessors had used that military power in various Cold War flashpoints.³²³

President Truman met Communist aggression in Greece and Turkey. President Eisenhower met Communist aggression in the Formosa Straits. President Kennedy met Communist aggression in Cuba. And when our destroyers were attacked, we met Communist aggression in the waters around Vietnam.³²⁴

The President had deftly placed Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin incident in the broader context of the Cold War.

Taking a cue from the pollsters about public fear of Barry Goldwater’s Cold War policies, Johnson contrasted the policies of Barry Goldwater with those of the Cold War presidents. These presidents, President Johnson said, had “used our great power with restraint, never once taking a reckless risk which might plunge us into a large-scale war.” Likewise, they had worked to settle disputes and “build bridges of understanding between people and between

³²² Lyndon B. Johnson, “DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech”, Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, “Quest for Peace,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³²³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “LBJ Speech & Promotional Campaign video,” *Campaign 1964*, black and white with sound, 27 minutes, August-November 1964, Video # MP648, “Johnson Half Hour Speech, Campaign ‘64,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³²⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “LBJ Speech & Promotional Campaign video,” *Campaign 1964*, black and white with sound, 27 minutes, August-November 1964, Video # MP648, “Johnson Half Hour Speech, Campaign ‘64,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

nations” including “working with the United Nations.”³²⁵ Unnamed others, President Johnson claimed, attacked these policies:

We are told that we should consider using atomic weapons in Vietnam and even in Eastern Europe, should there be an uprising. We are told that we should break off relations with Russia and with it any hope of lasting agreement. We are urged to withdraw from the United Nations and to stop our help to other countries. We have heard the test ban treaty denounced. This is the treaty that has halted the radioactive poisoning of the air that we breathe. We are urged to threaten others with force if they don't do as we say. We are told, in effect, to withdraw into an armed camp, with a few carefully selected friends, and try to intimidate our adversaries into submission.³²⁶

While Goldwater was never named, many of these proposals were caricatures of Goldwater's statements. President Johnson concluded that “this attack contradicts the entire course of America in the entire post-war period” and following this course would “discard the policies of the last 20 years. The peace of the world would be in grave danger.”³²⁷

While this ad painted Johnson as more moderate than Goldwater, it was still a full-throated endorsement of the Cold War consensus. A scene from President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address showed Kennedy saying, “Only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt, can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.” The ad then cut to footage of then Vice President Lyndon Johnson in Berlin during the Berlin crisis. This political advertisement implied—complete with footage of Johnson giving a speech in Berlin and

³²⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “LBJ Speech & Promotional Campaign video,” *Campaign 1964*, black and white with sound, 27 minutes, August-November 1964, Video # MP648, “Johnson Half Hour Speech, Campaign ‘64,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³²⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “LBJ Speech & Promotional Campaign video,” *Campaign 1964*, black and white with sound, 27 minutes, August-November 1964, Video # MP648, “Johnson Half Hour Speech, Campaign ‘64,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³²⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “LBJ Speech & Promotional Campaign video,” *Campaign 1964*, black and white with sound, 27 minutes, August-November 1964, Video # MP648, “Johnson Half Hour Speech, Campaign ‘64,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

American armored personnel carriers rolling through German streets—that Johnson had been a critical player in breaking the “siege” of Berlin.³²⁸

Similarly, the narrator recalled the Cuban missile crisis.³²⁹ Highlighting Kennedy’s measured firmness—presumably to contrast it with Barry Goldwater’s supposed rashness—the narrator summarized the situation at the time:

The country is closer to nuclear war than ever before. Use of United States strength might cause global holocaust. Retreating from the Soviet challenge would invite more aggression and endanger freedom around the world.³³⁰

The similarities to the Johnson administration’s arguments for military involvement in Vietnam are inescapable. The segment was echoing the Johnson administration’s arguments, based on the so-called lessons of Munich, that appeasement in Vietnam would invite the fall of all of Southeast Asia.

Lest some in the audience not make that connection, however, the ad then discussed U.S. policy in Vietnam. But, in this election-eve advertisement, the narrator stopped short of a full endorsement of U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia. The footage was of President Kennedy shaking the hands of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, footage of then Vice President Johnson shaking hands with members of the South Vietnamese government during his visit to Vietnam,

³²⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “LBJ Speech & Promotional Campaign video,” *Campaign 1964*, black and white with sound, 27 minutes, August–November 1964, Video # MP648, “Johnson Half Hour Speech, Campaign ‘64,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³²⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech”, Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, “Quest for Peace,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³³⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech”, Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, “Quest for Peace,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

and finally footage of South Vietnamese soldiers storming off of U.S. helicopters and into battle.³³¹ Over this footage, the narrator repeated the theme of measured firmness:

The struggle for Vietnamese independence must be carried on by the people of Vietnam. But we are helping them to fight their battle without taking rash action which might plunge millions of Americans into war.³³²

The Johnson campaign seemed to feel that the administration had not yet persuaded the American people to support direct U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

The narrator then transitioned seamlessly from these supposed triumphs of the Kennedy years to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, again effectively painting this incident as a continuation of America's measured firmness in the face of Communist provocations throughout the Cold War. As footage rolled of U.S. Naval ships in action, the narrator told the audience that it was in pursuit of the policy of military containment of Communism that the United States "demonstrated that it would meet aggression with firmness" in the Gulf of Tonkin. The narrator stated flatly that, "on August 3, 1964, American naval forces were attacked for the second time with gunboats from North Vietnam" and that, after Johnson had consulted with his advisors, "American air power was ordered to attack the bases from which the gunboats had come." The narrator continued: "The Communists could not doubt that force would be met with force." But, again evoking the specter of fear of Goldwater, the narrator added: "But neither would we take

³³¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech", Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, "Quest for Peace," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³³² Lyndon B. Johnson, "DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech", Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, "Quest for Peace," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

rash and impulsive action which might plunge us into large-scale war.” Quoting the President, the narrator concluded: “That firmness will always be measured.”³³³

This ad concluded by reinforcing not just the theme that U.S. military intervention in Vietnam was part of the Cold War strategy of containment of Communism, but arguing for the ideology of containment itself. The narrator began by conceding that “the Communists show signs of weakening,” describing the growing Sino-Soviet split in the Communist World. But, the narrator contended, as footage rolled of an angry-looking Soviet Premier Khrushchev giving a speech, “Its leaders are still dedicated to the destruction of freedom.” Again echoing the supposed lessons of Munich, the narrator reminded the audience: “The world of 1964 is a world of danger, where weakness can bring an end to freedom.” As footage rolled of Lyndon Johnson and his advisors in the White House, the narrator then reminded the audience of the dangers of electing Barry Goldwater as President: “. . . recklessness can bring an end to civilization.” The ad then cut to footage of America’s military land and sea arsenal, of nuclear missiles and fighter aircraft. As the footage rolled, a voiceover of a speech by Lyndon Johnson played, saying, “We have built this staggering strength that I have talked about not to destroy but to save. Not to put an end to civilization but to try to put an end to conflict.”³³⁴

The President had succeeded in convincing the American public that Communist expansionism was still a threat to world peace. Gallup polls from September and October found that Americans were afraid of a confrontation with the Communist World. “War” and “nuclear

³³³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech”, Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, “Quest for Peace,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³³⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “DNC-64-38-T: Quest for Peace w/ Pres. Johnson Speech”, Democratic National Committee, black and white with sound, 15 October 1964, Video #MP649, “Quest for Peace,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

war” together were Americans’ biggest fears, while “peace” was the biggest hope. By October, “peace...[and] freedom from fear of war or devastation” were the greatest hope of 54 percent of Americans. When Americans were asked to look ten years into the future, their biggest fears remained “war” and “nuclear war.” Their second biggest fear was “Communism.” By October, “war” or “nuclear war” was the greatest fear of over 51 percent of Americans.³³⁵

Americans’ prescription for these fears was continued investment in national security. Americans consistently opposed foreign aid programs, with 44 percent believing that they should be “reduced” and 15 percent believing they should be “ended.” However, when asked in September if the “American defense effort is proceeding at about the right rate,” 58 percent of Americans believed it was, while 30 percent believed the rate should be “increased.” These numbers remained virtually unchanged in October.³³⁶

Americans were also convinced that internationalism was important. Almost 74 percent of Americans believed that “the U.S. should cooperate fully with the United Nations.” Likewise, 83 percent of Americans believed that “the U.S. should take into account the views of its allies in order to keep our alliances strong.” Seventy-one percent of Americans rejected the proposition that the United States should “go [its] own way in international matters.” Similarly, 70 percent rejected the notion that “the U.S. should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along as best they can on their own.” And most Americans wished to maintain U.S.

³³⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-633POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, September 1964), 11-12, 39-48; The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-637POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, October 1964), 7-29, 31.

³³⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-633POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, September 1964), 11-12, 39-48; The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-637POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, October 1964), 7-29, 31.

dominance in world affairs. Nearly 60 percent agreed that “the U.S. should maintain its dominant position as the world's most powerful nation at all costs, even going to the very brink of war if necessary.”³³⁷

Sentiments were less strong when respondents were asked about President Johnson. When asked in September, 55 percent did disagree that President Johnson’s policies in the Cold War represented “a defeatist ‘no win’ policy on the international front by appeasing the Communists.” However, 61 percent believed that “the U.S. should take a firmer stand against the Soviet Union than it has in recent years.” Still, Americans agreed by 84 percent that “the U.S. should continue to negotiate with the Soviet Union on a broad front,” one of the Johnson administration’s policies.³³⁸ And when asked in October “How much trust and confidence do you have in what Lyndon Johnson stands for on international problems,” 65 percent responded that they had a “very great deal” of or “considerable” trust in Johnson. When asked how much trust they had in Barry Goldwater on international issues, nearly the same proportion, 59 percent, had “not very much” trust or “none at all.” These same proportions were seen between Johnson and Goldwater on Americans’ trust in their respective ability to deal with the specific international issues of “preventing World War III,” “handling Khrushchev [sic] and relations with Russia,” “handling the problem of Communist China,” and “controlling the use of nuclear weapons.”³³⁹

Perhaps most encouraging for the President’s aims in Southeast Asia, a Gallup poll in early October found that 89 percent of Americans had a “great deal” of or

³³⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-633POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, September 1964), 73-77.

³³⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-633POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, September 1964), 73-77.

³³⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-637POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, October 1964), 64, 69-70, 74-75.

“considerable...concern” about “combatting world Communism.” Americans were also now almost as concerned about Communist expansion in Southeast Asia as they were about Communist expansion in Europe. While 81 percent of Americans had a “great deal” of or “considerable...concern” about “relations with Russia,” 76 percent now had a “great deal” of or “considerable...concern” about “the problem of Communist China.” When asked which country “will turn out to be the greater threat to the U.S.—Soviet Russia or Communist China,” 55 percent of Americans chose China as a greater threat. Moreover, 69 percent were now concerned “a great deal” or considerably by “the problem of Vietnam.”³⁴⁰

However, the Johnson administration may not have convinced most Americans that Southeast Asia was worth going to war over. When asked in October 1964 how concerned they were about the problem of “keeping the country out of war,” 93 percent of Americans had a “great deal” or “considerable” concern.³⁴¹

Most importantly to the Johnson campaign, the campaign had convinced Americans to return President Johnson to the White House. In November; over 61 percent of Americans voted to reelect President Johnson, a victory that was due, at least in part, to the Gulf of Tonkin incident.³⁴²

During the first nine months of his Presidency, President Johnson and his administration made a concerted effort to convince the American people of the need for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The administration used arguments firmly founded in the ideology of

³⁴⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-637POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, October 1964), 36-42, 43-53.

³⁴¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-637POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, October 1964), 36-42.

³⁴² Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 38; Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, 90.

military containment of Communism to make this case. These arguments appealed to the very real Cold War consensus; the American public, members of the press, and members of Congress readily accepted the basic precepts of containment ideology. However, despite a vigorous public information campaign by the administration using these arguments, in the mid-summer 1964 the public and Congress did not support increased American military intervention in Vietnam.

The supposed attacks against the *U.S.S. Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on 4 August 1964 provided the political impetus for escalation of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam that nine months of administration rhetoric had failed to generate. President Lyndon Johnson used this incident as justification for a retaliatory air strike and a Congressional endorsement—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—to use military force to protect the sovereignty of South Vietnam from what his administration described as northern aggression. As soon as the President had this Resolution in hand, he and his administration returned to the rhetoric of military containment of Communism to justify the further U.S. military interventions it was planning in Vietnam.

In mid-summer 1964, the President had failed to convince the American people that intervention was needed and many Members of Congress were privately skeptical that failure to intervene would result in Communist expansion throughout Southeast Asia. For the President, the Gulf of Tonkin incident provided the political impetus to overcome these obstacles and get a Congressional resolution endorsing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The Johnson administration believed they needed this endorsement in case military intervention later became unpopular with Congress—a lesson Johnson believed he had learned from Truman's experience with Congress during the Korean War. In this context, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was a sort of insurance policy against Congressional dissent.

For the American people, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was dramatic evidence of what the administration had been saying consistently since President Johnson took office: the war in South Vietnam was a war of aggression by North Vietnam and if the United States did not answer that aggression, North Vietnam's aggression would only grow. In this context, to the degree that Americans were paying attention to Vietnam at all in 1964, the retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were evidence that the United States government had learned the lessons of Munich and was standing up to Communist aggression.

For Congress, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was evidence that the United States' measures thus far—advisors, material aid, and air support to ARVN forces—had failed to deter northern aggression. In this context, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was another escalation in and of itself. Much in the vein of the Formosa Resolution or the Middle East Resolution, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was an expression of American intent to protect South Vietnamese sovereignty that would discourage North Vietnam, Communist China, and the Soviet Union from persisting in their aggression. Congress intended this Resolution to prevent a war, not start one.

The administration had deceived the public and the Congress in its portrayal of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. And while, during the Congressional hearings and floor debate over the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Senators and Congressmen were assured that the President did not intend to escalate the war in Vietnam, members of the administration and the President himself were privately planning to increase U.S. military involvement in Vietnam on a tit-for-tat basis in response to North Vietnamese provocations. But, because there was little Congressional or press scrutiny of the facts of the incident, the administration's version of the events of 4 August was readily accepted by Congress and the public. And while Congress may have been deceived as to the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the President's intent for the Resolution, the

language of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution clearly expressed Congressional approval for further U.S. military escalation in Southeast Asia. It would not be until 1968 that full-scale press and Congressional scrutiny of the events of 4 August 1964 would finally force the President Lyndon Johnson to pay a terrible political price for his deception.

After the incident and the retaliation, the Johnson administration would first use the precedent of this initial retaliatory air strike, and later the Tonkin Gulf Resolution itself to justify “Americanizing” the Vietnam War through a series of escalations that culminated in the direct involvement of U.S. ground forces in the war. Throughout this period, the administration also used the ideology of military containment to justify escalation. A rapidly expanding list of opponents of the President’s Vietnam policy would focus on these justifications based on containment in attacking the growing U.S. military commitment in Vietnam.

Chapter 2 - The “Americanization” of the Vietnam War

Between the 1964 Presidential election and mid-summer 1965, the Johnson administration embarked on a series of escalations that would culminate in the direct involvement of U.S. ground forces in combat operations in Vietnam. Throughout this “Americanization” of the war, the Johnson administration continued to use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify increasing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

Throughout this same period, a growing list of opponents of the U.S. military escalation tried to attack the President's Vietnam policy by arguing against the suitability of the strategy of military containment of Communism to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. These opponents also sometimes attacked the entire idea of military containment of Communism, not just in Vietnam, but anywhere. This represented a dramatic broadening of the public debate on U.S. foreign policy; previously, questioning the tenets of the Cold War consensus had been beyond the pale of mainstream political discourse on foreign policy. Still, their attacks failed to persuade Congress or the American public to oppose the administration’s policy in Vietnam.

Initially, the administration also relied on the tit-for-tat precedent of the retaliatory air strikes during the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution itself as additional justifications for escalation. However, over the Americanization of the war, these arguments gradually receded from use until, finally, they had completely disappeared from the administration’s rhetoric. Tit-for-tat justifications became unnecessary to the administration as it finally decided on its course of Americanizing the war—the justification for each escalation beyond this point was simply that more U.S. forces were needed to contain Communist expansion. Use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—the administration’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—became unnecessary as a justification as it became clear that the

Congress would not make any public objections to the escalation or to the President's legal basis to escalate U.S. involvement in the conflict.

Flaming Dart

Only days before the U.S. Presidential election of 1964, the Viet Cong shelled an airbase at Bien Hoa, killing several Americans and destroying a number of U.S. B-57 bombers.³⁴³ In December 1964, flush with victory by the largest popular margin as yet in history,³⁴⁴ a newly-elected President Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnamese supply routes through Laos. Yet Viet Cong escalation continued; the Viet Cong bombed a U.S. officer's billet in Saigon on Christmas Eve. This attack was followed, on 7 February 1965, by a Viet Cong attack on the American barracks at Pleiku, killing eight and wounding over a hundred. President Johnson responded later the same day with a bombing raid of over 132 bombers against three barracks in North Vietnam, an operation called "Flaming Dart." He also ordered the evacuation of American dependents from South Vietnam.³⁴⁵

After the election, the administration resumed its use of containment to justify increased U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Most in the media were supportive of these arguments, though a few figures in the media and academia did begin to attack the administration's use of containment to justify the war or the ideology of containment itself. There was no public Congressional dissent immediately following the election, but there was private dissent from some key Members of Congress. President Johnson seemed unconcerned with this dissent, probably because he felt secured by his insurance policy against Congressional dissent, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The administration did occasionally harken to this insurance policy as a

³⁴³ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 417-429.

³⁴⁴ Robert Dallek, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President* (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 191.

³⁴⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 417-429.

justification for further U.S. military intervention. However, once the next escalation in Vietnam was initiated—the bombing of North Vietnam in response to a Viet Cong attack on the American barracks at Pleiku—the administration relied primarily on the precedent of tit-for-tat retaliation established by the Gulf of Tonkin incident as a justification.

Americans overwhelmingly (by 88 percent) wanted the United States to seek a negotiated settlement to the war in Vietnam in late 1964.³⁴⁶ However, most Americans also indicated that they would support a further escalation of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Nearly 58 percent of Americans said that they would “like to see” the United States “send more [troops] in,” but only if the United States had “to make a choice between taking our men out of South Vietnam, or sending more men in.” And the American public strongly believed (by a margin of 64 percent) that the United States “should...[be] involved with [its] military forces in Southeast Asia.”³⁴⁷ The ambiguous wording of this survey question—more or no troops in Vietnam—provides an inconclusive indicator of American public opinion on escalation; it is not clear if respondents would still support sending in more troops if the alternative was keeping the present level of troops rather than total withdrawal. But this response does indicate that a majority of Americans would rather escalate U.S. military involvement in the conflict than “lose” the war in Vietnam.

Just as before Johnson’s election, there was little media dissent on Vietnam before the beginning of the Americanization of the war. In fact, many media figures repeated the administration’s justifications for military intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of

³⁴⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 704* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 January 1965), 10.

³⁴⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 704* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 January 1965), 10.

Communism. For instance, columnist William R. Frye wrote that, while some wanted the U.S. military to pull out of Vietnam, “to pull out of Viet Nam would be to test the validity of the ‘domino theory’—the theory that loss of Indochina would lead to loss of Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and much more.” Frye quipped, “This theory may or may not be valid, but few in Washington are eager to risk a test.”³⁴⁸

A few media figures did dissent. Syndicated columnist Drew Pearson took a mild swipe at Presidential credibility on Vietnam, saying, “The American people have been getting only fragmentary information regarding the burden, the bungling in Vietnam.” However, Pearson was among media critics who had begun to attack one of President Johnson’s primary justifications for intervention in Vietnam based on the ideology of containment—the domino theory. Pearson noted that similar claims about a domino theory were made about Cuba, but that “the trend in Latin America is toward the right.”³⁴⁹

Washington Post columnist Joseph Alsop, a strong supporter of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, counterattacked against the growing use of the domino theory as a pejorative term connoting an overly simplistic conception of security in Southeast Asia. Alsop wrote that the White House was now frequently fielding the question: “Do you still believe in the domino theory?” Alsop added, “It is asked in a tone so scornful and accusing that little doubt remains about the current unpopularity of the ‘domino theory’ in White House circles.” Alsop then proceeded to recount “a mass of evidence to sustain the ‘domino theory,’” including purported Communist gains in Thailand, the Philippines, and Formosa. “All this and other evidence

³⁴⁸ William R. Frye, “The U.S. May Try Brass Knuckles,” United Nations, New York, *The Sunday Sun*, Vancouver, B.C., 2 January 1965, 4.

³⁴⁹ Drew Pearson, “Washington Merry Go Round: No Progress in 18 Years,” Washington, DC, *Prescott Evening Courier*, Prescott, AZ, 3 December 1964, 4.

indicates that the Chinese Communists are not merely hoping for an American defeat,” Alsop wrote, “they are already preparing to take advantage of it through their rather considerable agent-net.”³⁵⁰

There were signs that Congress had reservations about the administration’s intent to escalate U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam. In December 1964, the President received a concerned, private letter from Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield about Vietnam. Mansfield wrote that the administration remained on “a course in Viet Nam which takes us further and further out on the sagging limb.” Mansfield warned that the recent attack at Bien Hoa might signal “a growing boldness in the Viet Cong.” He also warned that, if the current weakness of the rotating South Vietnamese regimes continued, the United States would find that “preponderant responsibility for what transpires in South Viet Nam really rests with us even as it once had with the French.” This, Mansfield wrote, was a recipe for a perpetual U.S. military presence in South Vietnam, and perhaps an extension of the conflict into Cambodia or resurgence of the conflict in Laos.³⁵¹

Mansfield’s prescription for the administration’s impasse in Southeast Asia was for America to abandon its hope of containing Chinese influence in the region, “which is, in any event, culturally impossible and, in the long run, economically improbable.” The feasible alternative, Mansfield suggested, was to “forestall Chinese political and military domination of the area” and foster the “development of native institutions of national independence, regional cooperation and popularly responsible government.” This more limited goal fit with the “limited

³⁵⁰ Joseph Alsop, “Deep Trouble Brewing,” Washington, *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 3 February 1965, 1.

³⁵¹ Mike Mansfield, letter for President Johnson, “Subject: Developments in Viet Nam,” 9 December 1964, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

national interests” the United States had in Vietnam and, more importantly, the goal of eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces. Mansfield also had a number of specific policy recommendations designed to move the United States toward this broader goal—ending air strikes outside South Vietnam, fostering rapprochement between South Vietnam and Cambodia, bolstering Souvanna Phouma’s efforts to stabilize Laos, allowing U.S. allies to normalize economic ties with North Vietnam, focusing on building an inclusive and legitimate government in South Vietnam and forcing it to negotiate with the Viet Cong, and starting direct negotiations with China.³⁵² If these means were not successful, Mansfield concluded:

...we had better begin now to face up to the likelihood of years and years of involvement and a vast increase in the commitment, and this should be spelled out in no uncertain terms to the people of the nation.³⁵³

Lyndon Johnson’s response to Mansfield’s concerns seemed to miss the point. Johnson claimed to agree with nearly all of Mansfield’s assertions, yet he took “direct issue with” Mansfield’s suggestion that the United States was “overcommitted” in Vietnam. “Given the size of the stake,” Johnson continued, “it seems to me that we are doing only what we have to do.”³⁵⁴ Johnson did not seem to understand Mansfield’s basic premise that the stakes in Vietnam were not worth the massive investment of money and military might that the President seemed about to commit.

³⁵² Mike Mansfield, letter for President Johnson, “Subject: Developments in Viet Nam,” 9 December 1964, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³⁵³ Mike Mansfield, letter for President Johnson, “Subject: Developments in Viet Nam,” 9 December 1964, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³⁵⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, letter to Senator Mike Mansfield, 17 December 1964, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Nor did the President seem alarmed that Senator Mansfield, influential majority leader of the Senate, had reservations about the President's course in Vietnam. If the President and the administration had seen the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a "sense of the Senate" about U.S. military intervention as of August 1964, then Mansfield objections would have been a cause for alarm—and certainly would have prompted key members of the administration to meet with Senators in an attempt to allay their concerns. Instead, the President sent the Senator a short letter and then went forward with his plans to escalate the conflict. This is at least strong circumstantial evidence that the President saw the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent rather than as a transitory sense of the Senate.

The administration continued to rely on the ideology of military containment of Communism to convince the American people of the need for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. In an NBC news program called "A Conversation with Dean Rusk," Rusk rejected the term "domino theory" while embracing its precepts. Since the formation of North Vietnam, Rusk said, "Laos, and its neighbor, South Viet-Nam, came under direct pressure from North Viet-Nam." The source of this aggression was "the appetite proclaimed from Peiping."³⁵⁵ He quickly added, citing the lessons of Munich:

One doesn't require a "domino" theory to get at this. Peiping has announced the doctrine. It is there in the primitive notion of a militant world revolution which has been promoted by these veterans of the long march who now control mainland China. So we believe that you simply postpone temporarily an even greater crisis if you allow an announced course of aggression to succeed a step at a time on the road to a

³⁵⁵ Dean Rusk, "A Conversation with Dean Rusk, NBC News Program, on January 3, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, 18 January 1965, p. 64," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-25, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

major catastrophe.³⁵⁶

Rusk also inaugurated a new theme in this interview, one that the administration would echo repeatedly over subsequent years: failing to honor the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam would cause other countries to doubt the United States' commitments to them. "If we were to abandon Southeast Asia," Rusk said, "this would cause them [other allies] to wonder what our commitments under such arrangements as NATO would mean."³⁵⁷

On 4 January 1965, the day after Rusk's appearance on NBC, the President gave his annual State of the Union Address. He, too, painted the conflict in Vietnam as only one flashpoint in the Cold War contest with "World Communism." He did concede the multipolarity of the Communist threat, saying that each differs "in intensity and in danger" and that each requires "different attitudes and different answers." The President would seek comity with the Soviet Union and trade with Eastern Europe. However, the President warned that, "In Asia, communism wears a more aggressive face," a face that could be seen in Vietnam. Peace in Vietnam would come, Johnson said, "only when aggressors leave their neighbors in peace." But the United States would not "be found wanting" in defending the cause of freedom in South Vietnam.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Dean Rusk, "A Conversation with Dean Rusk, NBC News Program, on January 3, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, 18 January 1965, p. 64," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-25, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁵⁷ Dean Rusk, "A Conversation with Dean Rusk, NBC News Program, on January 3, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, 18 January 1965, p. 64," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-25, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁵⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 4, 1965," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*. Volume I, entry 2, (Washington, D.C.:

In answer to his own question, “Why are we there,” the President offered two answers. First, Johnson said, “Ten years ago our President pledged our help” in defeating “Communist aggression.” Johnson added, “Three presidents have supported that pledge. We will not break it now.” Second, echoing Rusk’s press conference from the previous month, Johnson insisted, “Our own security is tied to the peace of Asia.” Once more invoking the lessons of Munich, Johnson added, “Twice in one generation we have had to fight against aggression in the Far East. To ignore aggression now would only increase the danger of a much larger war.”³⁵⁹

It was not until early 1965 that the administration returned to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a justification for U.S. military intervention. In a speech on 7 February 1965, William P. Bundy said that the United States reasons for being in Vietnam were

...pretty well stated by Congress last August when it passed a resolution, following the Gulf of Tonkin affair, in which it stated that the United States “regards as vital to its national interest and world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.”³⁶⁰

However, Bundy also continued to use military containment arguments to justify escalation in Vietnam. While he insisted that he was not “using what’s sometimes called ‘the domino theory,’ that anything happens automatically or quickly,” Bundy still said that “if South Viet-Nam were

Government Printing Office, 1966), 1-9, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1965/01-04-1965.html>.

³⁵⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The State of the Union Address of the President to the Congress, January 4, 1965, Public Papers of the Presidents, Johnson, 1965, p. 3,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-25, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁶⁰ William P. Bundy, “William Bundy Discusses Vietnam Situation, February 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, March 8, 1965, p. 292,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-27, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

to fall under Communist control it would become very much more difficult...to maintain the independence and freedom of Thailand, Cambodia, of Malaysia, and so on.” Bundy also echoed his theme from January, that if “wars of national liberation” succeeded in South Vietnam, it would “be used elsewhere in the world.”³⁶¹

The President also resumed using the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. On 8 February 1965, when the President briefed Congressional leaders, including Senators Fulbright and Mansfield, on his intent to again bomb the North—Operation “Flaming Dart”—he cited the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as his authority to respond to attacks on the American Barracks in Pleiku. Fulbright did voice concern about the presence of Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers Kosygin in North Vietnam during the bombings. Mansfield pledged to support the President’s decision, but Mansfield still presented a memorandum to the President objecting to the quality of the South Vietnamese government.³⁶² None of the Congressional leaders questioned the validity of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a justification to escalate U.S. military involvement in the conflict. This probably only served to reinforce the President’s understanding of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution not as a transitory sense of the Congress but as a sort of insurance policy against Congressional dissent.

The President told the Congressional leaders at this meeting that he was prosecuting the Flaming Dart air strikes in response to the attack on the American Barracks in Pleiku. But it is clear from the recollections of administration officials after the fact that Pleiku was more of a trigger for planned action than a provocation that drew an American response. George Ball

³⁶¹ William P. Bundy, “William Bundy Discusses Vietnam Situation, February 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, March 8, 1965, p. 292,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-27, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁶² Karnow, *Vietnam*, 417-429; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 330; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 85.

recalls in his oral history from 1971 that U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor “was pressing this idea of gradually escalating the thing [the Vietnam War]” on a “tit-for-tat basis” well before Flaming Dart.³⁶³ Benjamin H. Read, then the Executive Assistant to Secretary of State Dean Rusk for Vietnam, recalls in his 1970 oral history that the decision to retaliate was “a decision made in haste.” However, he also recalls that there had been a great deal of discussion about retaliating against the next provocation that happened; Pleiku turned out to be that provocation. There was very little “fundamental debate” about the appropriateness of tit-for-tat escalation. The retaliation was, Read said, “a preordained conclusion.”³⁶⁴ The President was using the justification of tit-for-tat retaliation—a precedent he had established with the Gulf of Tonkin retaliatory air strikes and reinforced with rhetoric since before the Presidential elections. But the decision to escalate was rapidly outpacing North Vietnamese provocations.

Perhaps in response to the administration’s aggressive rhetoric, former U.S. ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith launched a concerted attack on the administration’s policies in Vietnam. Significantly, this was perhaps the broadest attack yet voiced in mainstream political discourse against the ideology of military containment. But it was also marked by its absence of reference to the administration’s recent use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to justify escalation. In an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* and in a speech in Pennsylvania at the annual Roosevelt Day dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action, Galbraith assailed America’s dogmatic adherence to an “obsolete” postwar anticommunist foreign policy framework. Galbraith spoke of three generations of thought on foreign policy since World War II. The first was a hope of

³⁶³ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 18-20.

³⁶⁴ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 4-6.

comity with the Soviet Union that was dashed by Stalinism. The second generation was a Cold War order assembled “against the monolithic power of communism.” The third and contemporary generation was one in which détente with the Soviet Union was possible—if hardliners in the State Department and elsewhere abandoned the assumptions of the second generation and stopped “clinging, sometimes rather righteously, to the recent past.” Embedded in Galbraith’s analysis was a critique of the rigidity—“the litany”—of the Cold War consensus.³⁶⁵ Galbraith also implicitly attacked President Johnson’s contention that his Vietnam policy was a continuation of 20 years of U.S. policy:

On domestic matters liberals invariably want and support and expect action. They do not praise continuity in our past approach....But in foreign policy the mood is less urgent. Here both the liberal and the official instinct is to accept present policies. This is true whether they are right, wrong, or potentially disastrous....We accept continuity in policies toward southeast Asia, China, the arms race, which are not working at all or which are certain to be a source of further deep trouble. We accept the view [in the State Department]...that improvement is the sort of annoying thing that restless outsiders and liberal Senators are always proposing.³⁶⁶

Galbraith concluded: “No man can afford to be thought soft on communism, Castro or the Panama Canal.” Rejecting “sermons from those who say we must stand firm, must never underestimate the Chinese menace,” Galbraith argued that rather than a “second generation

³⁶⁵ John Kenneth Galbraith, “Foreign Policy and Passing Generations,” speech by John Kenneth Galbraith at the southeastern Pennsylvania Roosevelt Day dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action, Philadelphia, PA, 30 January 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 2 February 1965, 1806-1807, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

³⁶⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith, “Foreign Policy and Passing Generations,” speech by John Kenneth Galbraith at the southeastern Pennsylvania Roosevelt Day dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action, Philadelphia, PA, 30 January 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 2 February 1965, 1806-1807, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

policy...to be firmly immobile on China,” the United States needed a “third-generation policy...that accepts reality—and avoids positions which are the prelude to failure.”³⁶⁷

While China figured prominently in his critique of the Cold War consensus, Galbraith was assailing the consensus on a much broader front. From Panama to Pakistan to India to “the poor countries,” Galbraith assailed U.S. policy as trapped in “second generation thinking.”³⁶⁸

Galbraith added:

We will not be defiled or defeated or destroyed if we do business with governments very different from our own. And certainly we won't be hurt by bringing the defense of our policy abreast of the course we actually follow.³⁶⁹

The media, on the other hand, was largely supportive of the administration's use of containment to justify escalation in Vietnam, and frequently echoed these arguments. The day of the Flaming Dart reprisals, *Washington Post* writer Donald S. Sagoria asked, “Is the domino theory valid?” His answer was firmly founded in the arguments the administration had been making since early 1964 for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. “Defeat for the United States in Vietnam,” Sagoria wrote, “...would almost certainly encourage the Chinese and other Communist parties in under-developed areas to believe that the Chinese model of ‘liberation

³⁶⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith, “Foreign Policy and Passing Generations,” speech by John Kenneth Galbraith at the southeastern Pennsylvania Roosevelt Day dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action, Philadelphia, PA, 30 January 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 2 February 1965, 1806-1807, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

³⁶⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, “Foreign Policy and Passing Generations,” speech by John Kenneth Galbraith at the southeastern Pennsylvania Roosevelt Day dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action, Philadelphia, PA, 30 January 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 2 February 1965, 1806-1807, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

³⁶⁹ John Kenneth Galbraith, “Foreign Policy and Passing Generations,” speech by John Kenneth Galbraith at the southeastern Pennsylvania Roosevelt Day dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action, Philadelphia, PA, 30 January 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 2 February 1965, 1806-1807, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

war' is neither so risky nor pointless, as the Russians have contended." A loss in South Vietnam would furthermore advance "China's major goal...to remove U.S. influence from Asia" by showing the United States to be a "paper tiger." Moreover, the loss of South Vietnam, Sagoria wrote, would result in "increased pressure on other pro-Western countries in Asia such as Thailand and Malaysia." A loss would also cause the Soviets to "give increased moral support to such wars [of liberation]" to compete with the Chinese for favor in the Communist World.³⁷⁰ Sagoria concluded by providing a more concise statement of the need for containment of Communism than even the administration had to date been able to provide:

The problem of how to contain Communism in Vietnam emerges inescapably as part of the much larger problem of how to contain Chinese power in Asia. While still in the minor leagues as a global power, China is now close to being the dominant regional power in Asia. The U.S. must either reconcile itself to this development, or be prepared for a long and costly effort.³⁷¹

Even the editors of the *Eugene Register-Guard*, the newspaper of perennial dissenter Senator Wayne Morse's adopted hometown of Eugene, Oregon, were forced to admit the compelling logic of the domino theory. An 11 February 1965 editorial pilloried the "'moral commitment' argument" for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and warned of "a full-scale war with the Chinese" if escalation continued. Yet, the *Register-Guard* still acknowledged the need for intervention in Vietnam: "The easy answer is to get out of there," the editorial said, "except for the 'domino theory.'" While the theory was "vigorously disputed," the editor noted that the domino theory "also has its knowledgeable and cautious champions." The editor also

³⁷⁰ Donald S. Sagoria, "The 'Domino' Theory in Vietnam," New York, *Calgary Herald*, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 8 February 1965, 5.

³⁷¹ Donald S. Sagoria, "The 'Domino' Theory in Vietnam," New York, *Calgary Herald*, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 8 February 1965, 5.

noted the growing Communist threat in Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.³⁷²

The editorial then made a prediction every bit as dire as those made by Secretary of Defense

Robert McNamara the previous year:

If the domino theory is valid, leading to a bridging of the territory between China and Indonesia, the world would have a new and horrible iron curtain, stretched almost the length of the far Pacific. About half the people of the world live along this route, from Siberia to somewhere south of the equator....

If the domino theory is valid, America, in pulling out of that part of the world, would be taking the first step toward the complete isolation of the Atlantic community from the Pacific community. Then the world would, indeed, be two armed camps.³⁷³

After the Flaming Dart attacks were executed, most in the press remained supportive.

Perhaps the only negative reaction came from James Reston of the *New York Times*. Still, Reston did not challenge the administration's use of the ideology of containment to justify increased U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Instead Reston criticized the administration's lack of frankness on the nature of the escalation. Reston's February editorial insisted that the President "call a spade a bloody shovel" and admit that the United States "is in an undeclared and unexplained war."³⁷⁴

By almost two to one, Americans supported the President's retaliatory air strikes.³⁷⁵ A February Harris Poll found that 60 percent of Americans had a positive opinion of how the

³⁷² Eugene Register-Guard, "The Key is the 'Domino Theory,'" *Eugene Register-Guard*, Eugene Oregon, 11 February 1965, 10A.

³⁷³ Eugene Register-Guard, "The Key is the 'Domino Theory,'" *Eugene Register-Guard*, Eugene Oregon, 11 February 1965, 10A.

³⁷⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 429; Helsing, *Johnson's War/Johnson's Great Society*, 81-82.

³⁷⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 430; Laura Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure: Great Powers, Communication Strategies, and Military Defeats* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 34-35.

President was “handling the situation in Vietnam.”³⁷⁶ A February Gallup Poll showed that a plurality of Americans accepted Vietnam as “the most important problem facing [the United States] today.”³⁷⁷ More importantly, the public accepted the President’s justifications for U.S. military intervention based on containment of Communism. The same Harris Poll cited above showed that the American public agreed with the President that either the “Chinese Communists” (53 percent) or “North Vietnam[ese]” (26 percent) were “behind the attacks by the Viet Cong.” Likewise, Americans, by 82 percent, accepted President Johnson’s explanation that bombing was being executed to “punish Communists” and about the same percentage believed that he was “right” to do so. Fifty-six percent believed it was “very important” to “win victory over aggression,” 63 percent believed that intervening in Vietnam was “very important” to “defend the security of the United States,” 66 percent believed it was “very important” to “help a non-communist nation resist communism,” and 71 percent believed it was “very important” to “stop communist infiltration.” Seventy-nine percent of Americans also embraced the tenets of the domino theory, saying it was “very important” to “try to keep the Communists from taking over all of Southeast Asia.” The same percentage believed that if the United States withdrew “from Vietnam the Communists would take over all of Southeast Asia.”³⁷⁸ The same February Gallup Poll cited above showed that 54 percent of Americans believed that, if the United States

³⁷⁶ Lou Harris, document covering public opinion polling on Vietnam and China, [15 February 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³⁷⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 706* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 February 1965), 6-8.

³⁷⁸ Lou Harris, document covering public opinion polling on Vietnam and China, [15 February 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

withdrew forces from Vietnam, “Communists would go into Thailand and other countries [and] China [would] take over all of South East Asia.”³⁷⁹

The American public’s prescription for the war in Vietnam was bombing the North until it agreed to a settlement. Sixty-nine percent favored the continued bombing of North Vietnam “if [it was] the only way to save South Vietnam.” Fifty-three percent believed that “stepped-up bombing in North Vietnam could lead to a negotiated settlement.” Seventy-five percent of Americans favored “the United States asking for negotiations to settle the war in Vietnam.” However, Americans remained divided on the need for more U.S. ground troops. Only 48 percent supported “sending a large number of American troops to help save South Vietnam.” Only 12 percent favored carrying “the war into North Vietnam at the risk of bringing Red China in.”³⁸⁰

Rolling Thunder and Sending Marines

Only three days after the Pleiku attacks and the Flaming Dart reprisals, the Viet Cong attacked a hotel in Qui Nhon that was being used as a U.S. enlisted men’s barracks.³⁸¹ The attack caused the building to collapse, killing 23 soldiers and wounding 21 more, the largest number of American casualties in a single attack to date in the war.³⁸² In response, Johnson approved a sustained bombing campaign dubbed Operation “Rolling Thunder” by the Pentagon.³⁸³ However,

³⁷⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 706* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 February 1965), 19-20.

³⁸⁰ Lou Harris, document covering public opinion polling on Vietnam and China, [15 February 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³⁸¹ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 226-260.

³⁸² McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 226-260.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

due to a series of technical and political delays, bombing did not actually begin until 2 March 1965.³⁸⁴

During the Rolling Thunder escalation and the first deployment of U.S. Marines to Vietnam, the administration continued to use the containment of Communism to justify increasing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Moreover, the media embraced and frequently echoed these justifications. However, this period saw two significant changes in the texture of the debate over the growing Vietnam War. First, while they continued to occasionally cite the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a legal justification for escalation, during this period the administration made a gradual decision to begin moving away from tit-for-tat reprisals in response to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong provocations and toward a more regular program of escalation. As a result, tit-for-tat justifications for escalation began to recede from administration rhetoric. Second, some in the media, as well as a few radical dissenters, began to make their opposition to escalation heard, focusing their attacks on the administration's use of containment to justify escalation in Vietnam and the ideology of containment itself.

Throughout this period, the President continued to use the ideology of containment to justify increasing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. In a speech to the National Industrial Conference in mid-February—after the attack at Qui Nhon but before the start of Rolling Thunder—the President emphasized the continuing Communist aggression against South Vietnam. America, the President said, had joined “in the defense and protection of freedom of a brave people who are under attack that is controlled and that is directed from outside their country.” The President reiterated a theme he had last used in mid-1964, that “we have no

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

ambition there for ourselves. We seek no dominion. We seek no conquest. We seek no wider war.”

Meanwhile, inside the administration, a consensus was forming to move beyond tit-for-tat retaliation in response to North Vietnamese provocations and toward a more regular program of escalation. George Ball opposed the stepwise, tit-for-tat escalation of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam on the grounds that it created a cycle of provocation and retaliation until, “finally, you're going to find the war is running you, and we're not running the war.”³⁸⁵

However, Benjamin H. Read, in an oral interview from 1970, claims that Rolling Thunder was the beginning of a transition from tit-for-tat reprisals to a deliberate escalation of the war independent of North Vietnamese actions. He writes that the administration was looking for a way to move from a tit-for-tat retaliation to a deliberate escalation.³⁸⁶ He said:

Retaliation is not an attractive premise to base major action on, and you're comparing apples and oranges in the most classic sense if you're trying to judge whether to strike X target because of a barracks' dynamiting or the blowing up of a bus. And as I recall it, in two or three weeks after the Pleiku bombing, everyone wanted to get away from trying to rationalize it on the ground of retaliating for a specific incident. The incidents were coming thick and fast, and the bombing program began to be looked at as a regular course of action.³⁸⁷

However there was still an element of tit-for-tat retaliation to the Rolling Thunder bombing. In an April 1965 National Security Action Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy explained that the intensity and tempo of the bombing would be driven by the rate of Viet Cong operations.

³⁸⁵ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 18-20.

³⁸⁶ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 4-6.

³⁸⁷ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 4-6.

The government, Bundy wrote, should even be prepared to “slow the pace [of the bombing] in the unlikely event VC slacked off sharply for what appeared to be more than a temporary operational lull.”³⁸⁸

Likewise the President did publicly justify the Rolling Thunder escalation based on the tit-for-tat precedent of the Gulf of Tonkin incident that he had last made before the election. He insisted that U.S. military actions would continue as long as they were “justified and...made necessary by the continuing aggression of others.” The President also gave the same assurances he had given for his earlier tit-for-tat reprisals, that “these actions will be measured and fitting and adequate.”³⁸⁹

However, the administration also used containment to justify this escalation. The day after the President’s speech, reports began to emerge from Secretary McNamara’s closed-door testimony before the House Armed Services Committee. These comments were also founded in the ideology of containment. According to the Associated Press, “McNamara stressed that the outcome in South Viet Nam is the key to stemming Communist expansion throughout strategic Southeast Asia.”³⁹⁰ The report quoted the Secretary of Defense as saying:

The stakes in South Viet Nam are far greater than the loss of one small country to communism.... We may be certain that as soon as they had established their control over South Viet Nam, the Communists would press their subversive operations in

³⁸⁸ McGeorge Bundy, “National Security Action Memoranda 328: Presidential Decisions with Respect to Vietnam,” (Washington, DC: The White House, 6 April 1965), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), accessed 9 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam328.asp>.

³⁸⁹ [Lyndon B. Johnson], speech to National Industrial Conference Board, Sheraton-Park Hotel, transcript, 17 February 1965, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, 21 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

³⁹⁰ Associated Press, “Situation in Viet Nam Not Hopeless, Says McNamara,” Associated Press, Washington, *Evening News*, Newburgh, NY, 18 February 1965, 1.

Laos and then in Thailand.... We would have to face this same problem all over again in another place or permit them to have all of Southeast Asia by default.³⁹¹

The report also noted that the Secretary believed that South Vietnam was the place to stop the “Chinese Communist position favoring violent revolution,” lest it spread to other regions. The Associated Press concluded, “McNamara appeared to embrace the ‘domino theory’ which holds that a stand must be made against communism lest one vulnerable Asian nation after another fall into the Red orbit.”³⁹²

However, some in the media began to challenge some of the administration’s arguments for escalation based on containment. A front-page *New York Times* article from 28 February 1965 criticized the administration’s evidence for northern complicity in the war in South Vietnam. The article recalled a recent State Department white paper describing increased North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong. The *Times* was skeptical of the “major new evidence” that the State Department had provided about “the sinking...of a...ship loaded with Communist made small arms and ammunition,” since the ship was “not much above the Oriental junk class.” The article warned that “American policy has plunged dangerously beyond the one enunciated then by the President and Secretary McNamara of limiting ourselves to retaliatory action and shunning a wider war.” The *Times* concluded by wondering what “massive air strikes would accomplish...except large-scale civilian casualties in industrial centers and ports,” especially in

³⁹¹ Associated Press, “Situation in Viet Nam Not Hopeless, Says McNamara,” Associated Press, Washington, *Evening News*, Newburgh, NY, 18 February 1965, 1.

³⁹² Associated Press, “Situation in Viet Nam Not Hopeless, Says McNamara,” Associated Press, Washington, *Evening News*, Newburgh, NY, 18 February 1965, 1.

the light of “the absence of any stable government in Saigon to fight or even to speak in the name of the South Vietnamese people.”³⁹³

Otherwise, the press generally supported the administration’s use of containment to justify military intervention in Vietnam. The Spartanburg, South Carolina *Herald-Journal* recounted statements by President Kennedy—highlighting their congruity with Johnson’s later statements—to reinforce President Johnson’s argument that he was simply continuing the policies of his predecessors. The article quoted Kennedy in September 1963, just before his death, saying that it “would be a great mistake” to withdraw from South Vietnam. With no hint of derogation, the *Herald-Journal* wrote that Kennedy subscribed to “the ‘domino theory’ in Southeast Asia,” saying that South Vietnam would not only give China “an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists.” The editors then favorably compared these statements with statements by Johnson from January 1964 that “neutralization of South Viet Nam would only be another name for a Communist takeover” and with Johnson’s 17 February 1965 statement that continuing U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam was “made necessary by the continuing aggression of others.”³⁹⁴

On the eve of the initiation of Operation Rolling Thunder, the American public remained firmly behind the President. By late February, according to a Gallup Poll, 85 percent of Americans said that they had “heard or read about the recent developments in Vietnam.” Nearly two thirds of Americans believed that “the U.S. is handling affairs in South Vietnam as well as

³⁹³ New York Times, “STORM SIGNALS OVER ASIA,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1965, reprinted in *William Winter Comments*, Sausalito, CA, 8 March 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

³⁹⁴ *Herald-Journal*, “Viet Nam Policy: What Our Leaders Have Said,” *Herald-Journal*, Spartanburg, S.C., 23 February 1965, 3.

could be expected.” Moreover, 78 percent believed that the United States should “continue its present efforts in Vietnam” rather than “pull out.” A narrow majority of Americans also expected further escalation of U.S. military commitment to the region; nearly 51 percent of Americans believed that “the situation in Vietnam is likely to lead to a bigger war.”³⁹⁵

Robert McCloskey, State Department spokesman, issued a fairly routine and legalistic statement to announce the beginning of Rolling Thunder. This statement used arguments based both in the ideology of military containment and the authority provided by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to justify U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam. McCloskey explained, “What we have in Viet-Nam is armed aggression from the North against the Republic of Viet-Nam.” The United States was “engaged” with South Vietnam “in collective defense against that armed aggression.” McCloskey did cite the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a justification for Rolling Thunder—a rare reference to the Congressional endorsement of U.S. military intervention. The administration’s legal basis for its intervention in Vietnam was the U.N. Charter, “the constitutional powers of the President and...the congressional resolution of August 1964 [the Tonkin Gulf Resolution].”³⁹⁶

That same day, Secretary of State Rusk made a much more impassioned plea for support of U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam before the U.S. Council of the International Chamber of Commerce. While he insisted that he was not talking about “something up in the

³⁹⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 706* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 February 1965), 18-19.

³⁹⁶ Robert J. McCloskey, “Viet-Nam Action Called ‘Collective Defense Against Armed Aggression’,” Department Statement read to news correspondents on March 4, 1965 by Robert J. McCloskey, Director, Office of News, Department of State Bulletin, March 22, 1965, p. 403,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-30-31, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

clouds called the domino theory,” Rusk once more reiterated this theory’s precepts. “Defeat of these aggressions is not only essential if Laos and South Viet-Nam are to remain independent,” Rusk insisted, “it is important to the security of Southeast Asia as a whole.” He reminded his audience that “Thailand has already been proclaimed as the next target by Peiping,” as part of its “proclamation of militant, world revolution.”³⁹⁷

Soon after the beginning of Operation Rolling Thunder, the administration, for the first time, introduced not just advisors but American ground forces into South Vietnam. First, Johnson ordered the deployment of two Marine battalions to protect the massive American airbase at Da Nang in South Vietnam. About a month after the beginning of Rolling Thunder, on 3 April 1965, after a dramatic Viet Cong bombing of the U.S. embassy in Saigon, Johnson sent more Marines, this time to the region around Hue, with the expanded mission to conduct independent offensive operations.³⁹⁸

This new escalation generated some additional media opposition. Like other opposition during this period, opposition from the media was focused on the administration’s use of containment to justify increasing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The Spartanburg, South Carolina *Herald-Journal* was one of the few press outlets to criticize this escalation, accusing the administration of deception. The paper indicted members of the administration with their own pronouncements on Vietnam in an article made up entirely of quotes from administration

³⁹⁷ Dean Rusk, “‘Some Fundamentals of American Policy,’ Address by Secretary Rusk Before the U.S. Council of the International Chamber of Commerce at New York, March 4, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, March 22, 1965, p. 401,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-30, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

³⁹⁸ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 220, 239, 244, 254, 260-261; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 341, 352; Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure*, 30, 31; Helsing, *Johnson’s War/Johnson’s Great Society*, 81; David E. Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2000), 413.

officials. The article recalled that McNamara, in a joint statement with then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Taylor, had promised in October 1963, “The major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965.”³⁹⁹ The article also reminded readers that, in February 1964, McNamara said:

I don’t believe that we as a nation should assume the primary responsibility.... Our responsibility is not to substitute for the Vietnamese but to train them.⁴⁰⁰

Likewise, the article quoted Ambassador Lodge in June 1964 as saying that he didn’t “see the need for more troops in Viet Nam.” The article concluded by quoting the most extreme version of the domino theory asserted by the administration.⁴⁰¹ In September 1964, Ambassador Taylor said:

It would be a major disaster for the United States to withdraw from Viet Nam. We could be pushed out of the western Pacific back to Honolulu.⁴⁰²

In a 21 March 1965 editorial, the *Eugene Register-Guard* made an about-face from support of the domino theory to opposition to it. The editorial assailed the “so-called dominos theory, much and loosely thrown about by American pundits and politicians.” The *Eugene Register-Guard* now pilloried this theory as positing that “the fall of South Viet Nam would, like one domino toppling all the others in a line, lead to the communization of Asia” pushing “America’s line of defense...back to Pearl Harbor.” The editorial claimed that the theory was

³⁹⁹ Herald-Journal, “Viet Nam Policy: What Our Leaders Have Said,” *Herald-Journal*, Spartanburg, S.C., 23 February 1965, 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Herald-Journal, “Viet Nam Policy: What Our Leaders Have Said,” *Herald-Journal*, Spartanburg, S.C., 23 February 1965, 3.

⁴⁰¹ Herald-Journal, “Viet Nam Policy: What Our Leaders Have Said,” *Herald-Journal*, Spartanburg, S.C., 23 February 1965, 3.

⁴⁰² Herald-Journal, “Viet Nam Policy: What Our Leaders Have Said,” *Herald-Journal*, Spartanburg, S.C., 23 February 1965, 3.

doubted by many and that it was “a more pessimistic view than the facts warrant.” The editorial claimed that the theory had captured the “minds of the U.S. strategists who are responsible for the recent series of bombing raids against North Viet Nam.” In direct contradiction to an editorial earlier in the year, the editors of the *Eugene Register-Guard* now rejected this thinking, writing, “South Viet Nam is not now and never was a strategic link in the chain the United States built to contain Communist China.”⁴⁰³

Yet, the editors of the *Eugene Register-Guard* still could not bring themselves to say the Vietnam War should not be fought. The editors wrote: “American prestige has been laid so on the line that defeat has become virtually an unacceptable alternative to more and bigger war.” America, the editors continued, was faced with a “dilemma.” On the one hand, the Communists were winning the guerilla war in the field and had “shown no indication they intend to lose over the conference table a battle they are winning in the field.” On the other hand, “The United States...must demonstrate graphically to the Chinese Communists, as it did to the Russians [during the Cuban missile crisis], that they can be beaten.”⁴⁰⁴ The United States, the editors concluded, had no choice but to fight and win in Vietnam.

Despite this new opposition from the media, the White House seemed to believe that the American public was firmly behind them as they introduced U.S. troops into the conflict in Vietnam. In a memorandum summarizing the results of a March 1965 Harris Poll, White House staffer Hayes Redmond noted that 77 percent of Americans favored “continuing air raids on [North Vietnam].” Redmond noted that the “dominant view” from the poll was still to “hold the

⁴⁰³ Eugene Register-Guard, “U.S. Still Unable to Find Keys to Success,” *Eugene Register-Guard*, Eugene, OR, 21 March 1965, 8A.

⁴⁰⁴ Eugene Register-Guard, “U.S. Still Unable to Find Keys to Success,” *Eugene Register-Guard*, Eugene, OR, 21 March 1965, 8A.

line.” Redmond concluded that there was “support for air raids and [a] clear, overwhelming mandate to send as many US troops there as necessary to withstand the Viet Cong attacks during Monsoon season.”⁴⁰⁵ This conclusion was at least partially contradicted by a Gallup Poll two weeks later. Sixty-eight percent of Americans did believe that the United States was “handling affairs in Vietnam as well as could be expected.” However, when asked what the United States should do next in Vietnam, only 38 percent of those who expressed an opinion believed the United States should “send in more troops” or wage “all-out war.” By contrast, 22 percent believed that the United States should withdraw and 20 percent believed that the United States should “continue [its] present policy” and “hold [its] ground.”⁴⁰⁶ While more Americans wanted escalation rather than withdrawal or a continuation of the status quo, this was by no means a “clear, overwhelming mandate” to send in ground troops.

The Rolling Thunder escalation and the deployment of Marines also generated new opposition from radical dissenters. Like opposition from the media, this opposition also focused on President Johnson’s use of military containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. However, radical dissenters also attacked the broader ideology of military containment itself. In a March edition of his newsletter *William Winter Comments*, California-based activist William Winter attacked what he called a history of “self-defeating” policies in U.S. relations with Communist China—from backing “the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-shek” simply “because

⁴⁰⁵ Hayes [Redmond], note on Harris Poll numbers, [9 March 1965], box 80 [2 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (August - December 1965) [2 of 2], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁰⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 706* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 2-7 April 1965), 6-8.

it was ‘anti-Communist’” to denying China a seat in the United Nations.⁴⁰⁷ But his main attack was on the ideology of military containment of Communism itself. Winter wrote: “After World War II it was accepted in Washington that unless there were a display of American war power the Soviet Union would expand its hegemony through military force.” However, Winter wrote, “since Stalin died, and the nuclear age became reality,” two things had become evident which undermined this idea. First, Winter wrote, “The Soviet Union is no longer bent on military aggression...because...there can be no success in nuclear conflict.” Second, the United States had since discovered “that giving guns to little countries around Eurasia will not frighten the Russians or thwart their plans for military attack.” Echoing Hans Morgenthau’s objections to the application of the strategy of containment to Southeast Asia from the previous year, Winter added: “If the Russians are impressed by American military power it is not because of our bases but because of our nuclear arsenal.” Winter added that even George Kennan, the initial author of the strategy of containment, had since rejected the policy. Further, containment forced the United States to support undemocratic regimes like those in Thailand and Saigon and regimes that openly defied Washington, such as that in Pakistan. “The ‘containment’ policy,” Winter concluded, “is unrealistic and does not serve America’s best interests. It should be re-examined. In fact, it should be scrapped.”⁴⁰⁸

While the American public may have been divided on whether it wanted to commit ground troops in Vietnam, a contemporary Gallup poll in April still showed that two-thirds of

⁴⁰⁷ William Winter Comments, “UNITED STATES AND CHINA,” *William Winter Comments*, Sausalito, CA, 8 March 1965, 4, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴⁰⁸ William Winter Comments, “UNITED STATES AND ‘CONTAINMENT,’” *William Winter Comments*, Sausalito, CA, 8 March 1965, 3, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

Americans supported Johnson's policy in Vietnam after the deployment of U.S. Marines.⁴⁰⁹ By early April, the public's approval of the President's handling of Vietnam had slipped slightly. In a letter to the White House, pollster Lou Harris wrote that, immediately after Rolling Thunder began, the President had a 60 percent favorable rating for his handling of Vietnam. By the beginning of April it was down slightly to 57 percent. By a margin of 60 percent, Americans did believe that U.S. troops would be required to stop "Communist infiltration of South Vietnam," but opinions remained mixed on whether the United States should take that step. Forty percent favored "sending large numbers of U.S. troops to Vietnam," while nearly the same percentage opposed such a move. Twenty-two percent were not sure.⁴¹⁰ Lou Harris summarized the sentiment of Americans at the beginning of April:

When asked what course we should follow in Vietnam today, 20 percent said the war should be carried into North Vietnam [with ground troops]...as well as air raids. Thirty-one percent thought we should negotiate with a view toward getting out, but the largest single group—46 percent—say we should hold the line doing what we need to do in order to maintain strength for the democratic position in South Vietnam.⁴¹¹

The administration clearly had not created a consensus behind the use of U.S. ground troops in Vietnam.

The Johns Hopkins Speech

A few days later, on 7 April, at the urging of his staff and in order to stem the early rumblings of dissent, President Johnson gave a primetime, televised address from Johns Hopkins

⁴⁰⁹ Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, 92-100.

⁴¹⁰ [Lou Harris], document covering public opinion polling on Vietnam and China, [6 April 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴¹¹ [Lou Harris], document covering public opinion polling on Vietnam and China, [6 April 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

University about the war.⁴¹² The address offered unconditional talks and aid money, but also promised continued American resolve to support South Vietnam.⁴¹³

In his Johns Hopkins speech, the President once more used the ideology of military containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. This speech did silence some of the criticism of escalation in the media. However, after this speech, Senator J. William Fulbright became the first Member of Congress to speak out publicly against escalation and suggest a bombing pause—a measure the administration was finally reluctantly forced to take. In his public opposition to escalation, Fulbright attacked the administration's use of containment to justify the war. This opposition in turn generated more dissent from the media and radical dissenters. That dissent, too, was focused on the administration's use of containment, as well as the ideology of containment itself.

In the Johns Hopkins speech, the President did return to a tit-for-tat justification for the American escalation. The President said: "In recent months attacks on South Viet-Nam were stepped up. Thus it became necessary for us to increase our response and to make attacks by air."⁴¹⁴ Yet this justification was now steeped in the rhetoric of military containment. The President once more blamed North Vietnam for the conflict. "The first reality," Johnson said, "is

⁴¹² Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, 412; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 259; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 352-353; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 119, 122-123; Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure*, 31; Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, 93.

⁴¹³ Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, 92-93; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 119-120, 127; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 259-260; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 354; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 429-433; Kimball, *To Reason Why*, 38; Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure*, 32.

⁴¹⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, "'Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia,' Address by President Johnson at John Hopkins University, Baltimore Maryland on April 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, p. 607," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-31-32, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

that North Viet-Nam has attacked the independent nation of South Viet-Nam. Its object is total conquest.” While the President conceded that “some of the people of South Viet-Nam are participating in attacks on their own government,” the President also said that “trained men and supplies, orders and arms, flow in a constant stream from north to south.”⁴¹⁵ The President said the escalation of U.S. military intervention was required “to slow down aggression.”⁴¹⁶ Invoking the lessons of Munich, the President reminded his audience:

Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Viet-Nam would bring an end to conflict. The battle would be renewed in one country, then another. The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next one.⁴¹⁷

Johnson also placed blame for the conflict in South Vietnam on “the deepening shadow of Communist China.” He continued: “The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peiping. . . . The contest in Viet-Nam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purposes.”⁴¹⁸ Johnson also answered

⁴¹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address at Johns Hopkins University: “Peace Without Conquest,” April 7, 1965,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*. Volume I, entry 172 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 394-399, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1965/04-07-1965.html>.

⁴¹⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia,’ Address by President Johnson at John Hopkins University, Baltimore Maryland on April 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, p. 607,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-31-32, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴¹⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia,’ Address by President Johnson at John Hopkins University, Baltimore Maryland on April 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, p. 607,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-31-32, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴¹⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia,’ Address by President Johnson at John Hopkins University, Baltimore Maryland on April 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, p. 607,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II:

the objections of those, like Hans Morgenthau, who the President claimed said “all our effort there will be futile—that China’s power is such that it is bound to dominate all southeast Asia.” Johnson’s response was that “there is no end to that argument until all of the nations of Asia are swallowed up.”⁴¹⁹

President Johnson also, once more, invoked the commitments made to South Vietnam by his predecessors. “Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Viet-Nam,” Johnson said, “and I intend to keep that promise.”⁴²⁰ But the President also painted this commitment as part of the broader commitment of the United States to contain Communism across the globe. Echoing Rusk’s arguments about the strength of US commitments from late-1964, Johnson said:

Around the globe, from Berlin to Thailand, are people whose well-being rests in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Viet-Nam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and in the value of America’s word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war.⁴²¹

D--The Johnson Administration, D-31-32, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴¹⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address at Johns Hopkins University: “Peace Without Conquest,” April 7, 1965,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*. Volume I, entry 172 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 394-399, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1965/04-07-1965.html>.

⁴²⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia,’ Address by President Johnson at John Hopkins University, Baltimore Maryland on April 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, p. 607,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-31-32, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴²¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “‘Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia,’ Address by President Johnson at John Hopkins University, Baltimore Maryland on April 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, p. 607,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II:

The telegrams and letters the White House received in response to the speech were very positive.⁴²² As a result of the speech, the White House received half as many letters and telegrams per week as it had before the speech, and those that did arrive went from 5 to 1 against the President's policy to 4 to 1 in favor.⁴²³

The response to the speech from the press—including the usually critical *New York Times*—was also positive.⁴²⁴ James “Scotty” Reston of the *New York Times* had, in the previous year, questioned the administration's justifications for U.S. military intervention based on the containment of Communism. But after the Johns Hopkins speech, he seemed to agree with President Johnson's arguments. In an article in late April, Reston embraced a major administration argument: if Communists succeed in using “wars of national liberation” in Vietnam, they will use this technique in other countries as well. Likewise, Reston joined the administration in placing the blame on Communist China. “What the Soviets attempted by political pressure on Western Europe, by threats of war over Berlin, by nuclear blackmail in Cuba and by their adventure in Korea,” Reston wrote, “the Chinese communists are now trying to achieve by subversion and guerrilla warfare in Viet Nam.” Reston also echoed the administration's assertions that the Soviets had embraced peaceful co-existence while the Chinese had not. And, while Reston insisted that “one does not have to believe in the domino theory,” he provided a warning as dire as any of Secretary McNamara's past warnings about the dangers of U.S. failure in Vietnam. If China could “triumph by limited war in Viet Nam,” Reston wrote, “the problem of countering limited wars from the Sea of Japan to the Persian Gulf

D--The Johnson Administration, D-31-32, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴²² McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 259-260; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 356.

⁴²³ Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 130.

⁴²⁴ Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 129.

will be even more serious than it is today.” After recounting alternative theories on how to deal with the Chinese Communist threat in Vietnam—from abandoning Southeast Asia to using nuclear weapons to abandoning all of Asia—Reston endorsed the Johnson administration’s approach of “hold[ing] the populous areas of South Viet Nam with...[U.S.] troops if necessary and meanwhile [using]...[U.S.] air and naval power to demonstrate that a continuation of the aggression in South Viet Nam will cost the communists in North Viet Nam more than they will gain in the South.”⁴²⁵

After the President’s Johns Hopkins speech, the administration gave several more speeches reinforcing his arguments. In a speech to the Detroit Economic Club, Leonard Unger, former U.S. ambassador to Laos, used nearly the exact same military containment rhetoric as the President. Unger repeated the administration’s warnings about wars of national liberation. Unger insisted that, while this strategy “was defeated in Malaya and the Philippines,” if it was not defeated in South Vietnam, it would emerge in “Africa and Latin America.”⁴²⁶ Secretary of State Rusk repeated the claims of northern aggression before the American Society of International Law only a few days later.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ James “Scotty” Reston, “Lack of strategy in limited war poses warning of future trouble,” Washington, *Press-Courier*, Oxnard, CA, 27 April 1965, 12.

⁴²⁶ Leonard Unger, “Address by Leonard Unger, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Before the Detroit Economic Club, ‘Present Objectives and Future Possibilities in Southeast Asia,’ April 19, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, May 10, 1965, p. 712,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-33-35, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴²⁷ Dean Rusk, “Address by Secretary Rusk, Made Before the American Society of International Law on April 23, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, May 10, 1965, p. 697,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-37, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Perhaps the first public Congressional dissent outside of the consistent dissent of Senators Morse and Gruening, came from Senator J. William Fulbright about a week after the President's Johns Hopkins speech. Senator Fulbright attacked the administration's use of containment to justify its escalation. The occasion for this dissent was Secretary Rusk's assertion in a Congressional hearing that a halt in the bombing "would only encourage the aggressor and dishearten our friends who bear the brunt of battle." Fulbright disagreed with the Secretary in this hearing, saying that bombing might be counterproductive by causing the North Vietnamese to "dig in" and discouraging the Soviets from negotiating. He stated that the United States should stop the bombing, adding, "We could resume bombing at any time if there is no response."⁴²⁸

In an interview after this first public objection, Fulbright claimed that he still supported the administration's policy on Vietnam, especially the ideas in President Johnson's Johns Hopkins speech. However, Fulbright added, "before the escalation goes too far, a temporary cease-fire might be advisable." Fulbright also questioned whether the North Vietnamese had absolute control over the Viet Cong.⁴²⁹

Fulbright's objection drew an angry response from the administration. Secretary of Defense McNamara both rejected Fulbright's suggestion and reiterated the argument that North Vietnamese aggression drove the war in Vietnam. "We have no indications," McNamara

⁴²⁸ Associated Press, "U.S. Navy Warplanes Edge Closer to Hanoi As Rainy Season Nears: Fulbright Urges Raid Halt; Sennis Sees War Step-Up," Associated Press, Washington, *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, TN, 19 April 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴²⁹ Associated Press, "U.S. Navy Warplanes Edge Closer to Hanoi As Rainy Season Nears: Fulbright Urges Raid Halt; Sennis Sees War Step-Up," Associated Press, Washington, *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, TN, 19 April 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

insisted, “that a cessation of the bombing would move the North Vietnamese to discussions leading to termination of their aggression in the South.”⁴³⁰

Former ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith publicly supported Fulbright’s call for a bombing halt and, while stopping just short of accusing the President of duplicity, claimed that the bombing made the President’s promise of peace negotiations harder to deliver. In a letter to the *New York Times*, Galbraith wrote that bombing “hardened the morale of those under attack” and that the “raids undercut the offer of negotiations by the President.” More than counterproductive, however, Galbraith claimed the raids were ineffectual since “they are not directed at cities, something that the President has scrupulously resisted.” Presaging later attacks on the effect of the escalation in Vietnam on U.S. allies, Galbraith concluded that, “most importantly, the attacks are alienating our friends in Asia, Europe, and Africa and quite possibly strengthening and consolidating our opposition.”⁴³¹

The administration’s refusal to stop the bombing to give peace negotiations a chance also drew attacks from radical dissenters—attacks centered on the efficacy of the ideology of containment to the growing war in Vietnam. Charles A. Wells, in his *Wells Newsletter*, published a political cartoon entitled “Won’t This Be Rather Difficult?” depicting Lyndon Johnson running alongside Vietnamese villagers fleeing American bombers. In a jab at the President Johnson’s Johns Hopkins speech, Johnson held a document in his hand labeled

⁴³⁰ Associated Press, “U.S. Navy Warplanes Edge Closer to Hanoi As Rainy Season Nears: Fulbright Urges Raid Halt; Sennis Sees War Step-Up,” Associated Press, Washington, *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, TN, 19 April 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴³¹ John Kenneth Galbraith, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, 27 April 1965, reprinted in “Johnson So Far III: Foreign Policy” by Maurice J. Goldbloom, American Jewish Committee, *Commentary*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1965): 47-55, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

“[South] East Asia Aid Program.”⁴³² The extended caption beneath this cartoon claimed that “the whole world has been offended by our bombing of North Vietnam—the greatest, richest and most powerful nation on Earth pouncing with the most ultra modern weapons on a tiny impoverished illiterate Communist dictatorship.” But the caption also attacked the administration’s dishonesty about the prosecution of the war. Wells warned: “don’t let our own propaganda brainwash you—civilians are being slaughtered.”⁴³³

Fulbright’s relatively narrow attack on U.S. policy in Vietnam was joined by broader criticism from the press not tied to bombing. These critiques also focused on the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. A 22 April 1965 editorial from Fulbright’s home state in the *Arkansas Gazette* began by reprinting a line from its 9 May 1954 edition that criticized the French government in power during the French defeat at Dienbienphu for “the vacillating, unrealistic policies of their own ramshackle government which brought these magnificent soldiers to their terrible defeat.” The editorial then claimed that Americans did not “understand Southeast Asia better now than they did 11 years ago.” And, while the editorial claimed that Americans were fond of mocking the French, who “were stupid to have attempted to cling to empire when the days of empire had passed,” this stupidity was born of the common “Western delusion that Western arms could contain Asian aspirations.” The editor added: “One need only look at the shape events have taken

⁴³² [Charles A. Wells], “Won’t this be rather difficult,” political cartoon and text, *Wells Newsletter*, Newtown PA, 1 May 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴³³ [Charles A. Wells], “Won’t this be rather difficult,” political cartoon and text, *Wells Newsletter*, Newtown PA, 1 May 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

in Vietnam to wonder whether the West ever has learned anything important about the East.”⁴³⁴

The editorial followed by asking a tough question:

How does one save from what we Americans view as a foreign invasion a country which cannot maintain the security of its own capital or of any other sizable piece of real estate[?]⁴³⁵

The editorial warned: “If we intend to win it we had better get ready to run, and to man, the whole shooting match ourselves.” The *Gazette* believed this was the making of “another Korea.” This editorial also questioned whether air attacks could achieve “the stabilization of the military situation in South Vietnam. The editors wondered: “if they fail to achieve [stability] soon, are we simply to extend them indefinitely?” Moreover, the *Gazette* claimed that this would eventually provoke a Chinese military response and warned “of time running out” with “rational calculation already a casualty of the emotions stirred in this country by the Vietnamese deadlock.”⁴³⁶

Venerable dean of the Washington press corps Walter Lippmann challenged the administration’s dogmatic adherence to “the so-called domino theory.” He noted that, despite applying “this theory ever more vigorously,” the United States was “not only isolated but increasingly opposed by every major power in Asia.” Noting the objections of the major powers in Asia, from Pakistan to the Soviet Union, he wrote that “the dominoes are indeed falling, and they are falling away from us,” because Asians perceived the U.S. war in Vietnam as “a war by

⁴³⁴ Arkansas Gazette, “Dien Bien Phu: Lesson Learned and Forgotten,” editorial, *Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, AR, 22 April 1965, 6A, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴³⁵ Arkansas Gazette, “Dien Bien Phu: Lesson Learned and Forgotten,” editorial, *Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, AR, 22 April 1965, 6A, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴³⁶ Arkansas Gazette, “Dien Bien Phu: Lesson Learned and Forgotten,” editorial, *Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, AR, 22 April 1965, 6A, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

white men from the west against nonwhite men in Asia.” Lippmann’s prescription was that the United States reject its instinctive adherence to “the white man’s burden” and show the same enlightenment it was showing in its “illumination, which has come so recently here at home, that the American Negro must become a full, not a second class, citizen.”⁴³⁷

Lippmann’s critique of the application of the “white man’s burden” to South Vietnam and the resultant reverse domino theory⁴³⁸ echoed throughout the media. For instance, a *St. Petersburg Times* editorial claimed that the chief handicap to American troops’ efforts was “the color of their skin.” Explicitly dismissing the administration’s arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on military containment —particularly its claims that it had no “interest in Asian territory” and that the current policy in Vietnam was part of a “long history of U.S. support of Asia for the Asians”—the editor claimed that Asians saw the growing war in Vietnam as “white men shooting Asians.” Without citing Lippmann, the editorial also echoed the theme that the result of this policy was that the United States was experiencing a “reverse domino theory” of diminishing influence in Asia.⁴³⁹

Yet, while the editors of the *St. Petersburg Times* agreed with Lippmann’s conclusion that the United States was critically handicapped in its war in South Vietnam because of the skin color of its troops, the editors still believed that the Vietnam War must be fought. The editors quoted “Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, his own country under guerrilla attack by Indonesia with Red China’s blessing,”⁴⁴⁰ as saying:

I feel that the American action to help South Viet Nam is a proper one because unless

⁴³⁷ Walter Lippmann, “Asians Resent White Man’s Intrusion in Viet War,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 23 April 1965, 14.

⁴³⁸ Walter Lippmann, “Asians Resent White Man’s Intrusion in Viet War,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 23 April 1965, 14.

⁴³⁹ *St. Petersburg Times*, “Awakening The East,” *St. Petersburg Times*, St. Petersburg, FL, 1 May 1965, 10-A.

⁴⁴⁰ *St. Petersburg Times*, “Awakening The East,” *St. Petersburg Times*, St. Petersburg, FL, 1 May 1965, 10-A.

America supports South Viet Nam there is no chance for this Republic [of Malaysia] to survive.⁴⁴¹

This comment was an implicit proof of the domino theory; an Asian leader believed that, if South Vietnam fell to Communism, his country would fall as well. As a result, the *St. Petersburg Times* endorsed “the core of U.S. objectives in Viet Nam,” to force North Vietnam to respect the “national borders” of South Vietnam and not “interfere” in its affairs.⁴⁴²

The power of the Lippmann’s reverse domino theory as a counter-argument to the administration’s justifications for escalation based on the containment of Communism would eventually force the White House to respond. In a news conference the President was asked if “the United States is losing, rather than making, friends around the world, with its policy in Viet-Nam—sort of a falling domino theory in reverse?” The President responded that, following his Johns Hopkins speech, he had received “almost a universal approval” from U.S. allies. The President said that, despite the fact that “our enemies would have you believe that we are following policies that are ill-advised,” the United States was “following the same policies in Asia that we followed in Europe, that we followed in Turkey and Greece and Iran.” The United States was “resisting aggression” in Vietnam and would continue “whether we make friends or lose friends.”⁴⁴³

While tit-for-tat justifications for retaliation were already beginning to recede from administration rhetoric, in this 28 April 1965 news conference, President Johnson once more used tit-for-tat responses to North Vietnamese aggression to justify his escalation. The President highlighted that the United States had used its “great power with the utmost restraint...in the face

⁴⁴¹ *St. Petersburg Times*, “Awakening The East,” *St. Petersburg Times*, St. Petersburg, FL, 1 May 1965, 10-A.

⁴⁴² *St. Petersburg Times*, “Awakening The East,” *St. Petersburg Times*, St. Petersburg, FL, 1 May 1965, 10-A.

⁴⁴³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

of the most outrageous and brutal provocation against Vietnamese and against Americans alike.” The President reminded reporters that the United States had made no further escalations for six months after the Gulf of Tonkin airstrikes.⁴⁴⁴ Johnson claimed that the North Vietnamese’ answer to this extraordinary restraint had been

...attack, and explosions, and indiscriminate murder. So it soon became clear that our restraint was viewed as weakness; our desire to limit conflict was viewed as a prelude to our surrender.⁴⁴⁵

Johnson concluded that the United States had to strike because it “could no longer stand by while attacks mounted and while the bases of the attackers were immune from reply.”⁴⁴⁶

The President also continued to use containment to justify escalation. In this same news conference, President Johnson explicitly invoked Munich in warning about the dangers of ignoring aggression:

This is the clearest lesson of our time. From Munich until today we have learned that to yield to aggression brings only greater threats—and more destructive war. To stand firm is the only guarantee of lasting peace.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

⁴⁴⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

⁴⁴⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

⁴⁴⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at a News Conference at the White House on April 27, 1965 and Transcript of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’s New [sic] Conference of April 26, 1965 on the Situation in Viet-Nam, Department of State Bulletin, May 17, 1965, p. 748,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-39-40, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

North Vietnam was guilty of aggression, by the “covert infiltration of a regular combat unit of the North Vietnamese Army into South Viet-Nam.” Likewise, Johnson said, “The great bulk of the weapons [which] the Viet Cong are using and with which they are supplied come from external sources.”⁴⁴⁸ In the final analysis, the President said:

Independent South Vietnam has been attacked by North Vietnam. The object of that attack is total conquest. Defeat in South Vietnam would deliver a friendly nation to terror and repression.

It would encourage and spur on those who seek to conquer all free nations that are within their reach. Our own welfare, our own freedom, would be in great danger.⁴⁴⁹

Still, the President insisted, America’s “purpose is peaceful settlement. That purpose is to resist aggression. That purpose is to avoid a wider war.” The President insisted, “Aggression [had] been halted...under President Truman, under President Eisenhower, under President Kennedy, and it will be true again in southeast Asia.”⁴⁵⁰

The President also responded directly to Senator Fulbright’s dissent on bombing the north. In the same 28 April news conference, the President was reminded by a reporter, “A number of critics of your Viet-Nam policy say they support our presence in South Viet-Nam, but do not support the bombing raids to the North.” The President responded by wondering aloud

⁴⁴⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at a News Conference at the White House on April 27, 1965 and Transcript of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’s New [sic] Conference of April 26, 1965 on the Situation in Viet-Nam, Department of State Bulletin, May 17, 1965, p. 748,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-39-40, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁴⁴⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

⁴⁵⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

“how some people can be so concerned with our bombing a cold bridge of steel and concrete in North Viet-Nam, but never open their mouths about a bomb being placed in our embassy in South Viet-Nam.” He added, “There are not many civilians involved in a radar station, but we do try to make it ineffective so that they cannot plot our planes and shoot our boys out of the skies.”⁴⁵¹ He concluded by reinforcing his argument that the Vietnam War was about military containment of Communism.

We regret the necessity of doing this, but as long as aggression continues, as long as they bomb in South Viet-Nam, as long as they bomb our sports arenas, and our theaters, and our embassies, and kill our women and our children and the Vietnamese soldiers, several thousand of whom have been killed since the first of the year, we think that we are justified in trying to slow down that operation and make them realize that it is very costly, and that their aggression should cease.⁴⁵²

These arguments may have been persuasive to the American people, but they were also deceptive. There would, inevitably, be civilian casualties as a result of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam and President Johnson knew it. When, in the following years, Americans were confronted with indisputable evidence of civilian casualties, these comments would return to haunt the President, and damage his credibility with the American people.

While dissent in the media was growing, most in the Washington press corps remained supportive of the President’s arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of Communism. During the press conference, one journalist asked, “Do you think any of the participants in the national discussion on Viet-Nam could appropriately be likened to the appeasers of 25 or 30 years ago?” The question echoed statements the President had himself

⁴⁵¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

⁴⁵² Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

made about the lessons of Munich and those who had refused to acknowledge the threat of pre-war Germany. Another journalist asked the President to “evaluate...the threat that has been posed by Red China to send volunteers into Viet-Nam if we escalate the war further?”⁴⁵³ The question reinforced the administration argument that China was behind North Vietnamese aggression against South Vietnam. While the President demurred, not answering either question directly, the questions themselves supported the administration’s arguments.

The Memphis, Tennessee *Commercial Appeal* both supported the administration’s arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and attacked Senator Fulbright’s suggestion of a bombing halt. The editorial echoed five key elements of the administration’s arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam—that “the infiltration of arms and troops from North Vietnam continues,” that “the Hanoi government maintains its close control over Viet Cong strategy,” that Peking and Moscow were also complicit in the war in Vietnam, that “Red China and North Vietnam are embarked on an attempt to prove the efficacy of so-called wars of liberation,” and that “if they can gain control of South Vietnam there will be more such wars.” The *Commercial Appeal* added that “the [Operation Rolling Thunder] air strikes have contributed significantly to an improvement in South Vietnamese morale.” The editors wrote that Senator Fulbright knew all of these facts and, further, knew that “there has been no...attempt by any of the Communist powers to indicate an interest in Vietnam negotiation.” Yet, the editorial charged, Fulbright was “unseemly” in creating “the impression among Americans that some solution might be possible if only we relaxed the pressure on North Vietnam.” The

⁴⁵³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1965, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

Commercial Appeal added that Senator Fulbright's call for a bombing halt discouraged "the international support which the United States is seeking for the Saigon government."⁴⁵⁴

Supporters of the President's policies in Vietnam echoed his use of containment as well. In early May, Arthur H. Dean, chief negotiator during the Korean War, joined the debate on a bombing pausing firmly on the side of the administration. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Dean unequivocally echoed the administration's claim that "the Chinese Communists under Mao Tse-tung have aided and abetted Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam in arming and building up the guerrilla forces infiltrating and operating in South Vietnam and Laos." Dean conceded that the North Vietnamese Communists "may or may not be able to control" the National Liberation Front, but still called the Viet Cong "guerrilla insurgents who are not only Communists but agents of North Vietnam."⁴⁵⁵ Likewise, Dean repeated the administration's connection of the domino theory to the credibility of the United States' worldwide commitments.

A defeat for us in Southeast Asia would have disastrous consequences for Thailand, Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia. The fall of Southeast Asia to the Communists—with resultant control of sea and air power—would certainly render much more difficult our ability to carry out our treaty obligations to parties in the SEATO, Australia and New Zealand. Minority parties in the Philippines to the East, and Formosa, Japan and Korea to the North might then demand that we get rid of mutual security treaties and of our bases in those countries so that they would be free to negotiate with

⁴⁵⁴ *Commercial Appeal*, "No Time To Pause," editorial, *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, TN, 30 April 1965, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴⁵⁵ Arthur H. Dean, letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in support of Vietnam policy, 7 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Communist China.⁴⁵⁶

The same day as the President's news conference, Secretary McNamara held a news conference at which he was asked whether he was "annoyed" that the growing war in South Vietnam had begun to be referred to as "McNamara's war." McNamara responded that he was happy to be associated with "a war that is being fought to preserve the freedom of a very brave people, an independent nation." McNamara also used this opportunity to be the first administration official to claim that not just the Communist Chinese but also the Soviets endorsed wars of liberation "to subvert independent nations." McNamara concluded: "It is a strategy I feel we should oppose, and, while it is not my war, I don't object to my name being associated with it."⁴⁵⁷

The administration would, only a few days later, implement the bombing pause Fulbright had suggested. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Arthur Krock criticized the administration for this reversal only days after a flurry of administration attacks on Fulbright and his suggestion, culminating in the President's press conference on the matter. In the article, Krock reported that the highest officials engaged in a "round of shooting-from-the-hip with Fulbright's suggestion as their target" before the administration actually embraced the suggestion and temporarily halted bombing. Krock described these attacks as an "instant hostility" that the sober idea of a

⁴⁵⁶ Arthur H. Dean, letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in support of Vietnam policy, 7 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁵⁷ Robert S. McNamara, "Statement by President Johnson at a News Conference at the White House on April 27, 1965 and Transcript of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's New [sic] Conference of April 26, 1965 on the Situation in Viet-Nam, Department of State Bulletin, May 17, 1965, p. 748," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-39-41, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

temporary bombing halt did not merit. Krock cited Rusk as dismissing the idea on the grounds that “it would only encourage an aggressor and discourage our friends.” Krock wrote that McNamara misrepresented Fulbright’s suggestion as a “termination of the strikes,” when Fulbright had in fact only recommended “a temporary ceasefire.” McNamara, like Rusk, also warned that a halt “would dishearten a brave people.” Krock concluded by mocking the administration, noting that their deep philosophical objections expired 20 days later, and “with it the fiery administration global rhetoric about ‘encouraging aggressors and disheartening friends’” as the United States initiated a temporary, unilateral bombing halt, just as Fulbright had suggested.⁴⁵⁸

Meanwhile, radical dissenters continued to attack the administration’s use of military containment to justify military intervention in Vietnam. Charles A. Wells, in his *Wells Newsletter*, criticized the application of the military containment model to what he called “Asia’s revolution” and attacked the “dangerous fable that a revolution can be subdued by force of arms.” Comparing the indigenous war in Vietnam to the American, French, and Russian revolutions, Wells claimed that the Western motivation for stopping Asian revolutions was “so that the profitable exploitation of Asia's people and resources might continue.” Further, he argued that it was Western opposition to the Vietnamese revolution that made the insurgents in Vietnam turn to Communism. The United States’ error in backing South Vietnam, Wells wrote, was adhering to “the unsound thesis that anybody who’s against communism would make a good ally.” The United States compounded its error by using tactics that matched “the insidious Red

⁴⁵⁸ Arthur Krock, “Fulbright’s Refused Stone Now at the Headstone,” Washington, DC, *New York Times News Service*, 18 May 1965, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

terror with napalm bombs and shrapnel, wiping out whole villages to get at a few Vietcong Communists—whom we usually missed.”⁴⁵⁹

Wells’ prescription was three-fold. “First,” Wells wrote, “the U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam should cease.... Certainly if our intentions are to help people, we should stop killing them.” Wells’ second suggestion answered the argument of Walter Lippmann that white men could not quell Asian conflicts. Wells wrote that “Asian allies” should be sent into South Vietnam “under the auspices of the United Nations to replace our white U.S. military units whose presence to most illiterate Vietnamese peasants is indistinguishable from that of the French.” Only then, Wells wrote, could “the Mekong Delta project and all of its numerous subsidiaries...go into full action” and only then could “President Johnson’s dramatic call for “unconditional negotiations” swing the weight of moral force at last to our side.” Wells concluded: “Let the Communists attempt to block these efforts in Southeast Asia—if they dare.”⁴⁶⁰ Thus, in the final analysis, Wells was not rejecting the goal of blocking Communist expansion in Vietnam, only the contemporary U.S. tactics for achieving that goal.

Most Americans rejected the idea of a bombing pause in late April 1965. When asked whether the United States “should continue to bomb North Vietnam,” 74 percent believed that the bombing “should continue.” Likewise, two thirds of Americans still believed that the United States “should...[be] involved with our military forces in Southeast Asia.” However, there was still no clear consensus behind introducing large numbers of U.S. ground troops into the conflict

⁴⁵⁹ Charles A. Wells, “X-Ray and Forecast: Out of History—From Revolution to Reconciliation,” *Wells Newsletter*, Newtown PA, 1 May 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁴⁶⁰ Charles A. Wells, “X-Ray and Forecast: Out of History—From Revolution to Reconciliation,” *Wells Newsletter*, Newtown PA, 1 May 1965, 1, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

in Vietnam. Only 35 percent of Americans supported sending in “more troops” or “all-out war” in Vietnam. By contrast, 20 percent wanted to “continue [the] present policy” in Vietnam and the same number wanted to “withdraw” (down two percent from the beginning of the month).⁴⁶¹

The Teach-Ins

With the initiation of Rolling Thunder, a small but noticeable wave of anti-war sentiment began to move through the United States. In Congress, a small group of influential, liberal Senators began to speak openly against the administration’s policy in Vietnam.⁴⁶² The editorial pages of a number of newspapers, led by the *New York Times*, began to protest against the escalating conflict.⁴⁶³ And the University of Michigan held its first 12-hour marathon “teach-in” against the war.⁴⁶⁴ While these critics occasionally attacked the administration’s credibility, they primarily attacked the administration’s chief justification for U.S. military escalation in Vietnam: the ideology of military containment of Communism.

The teach-in in Michigan was just one of a number of public academic events aimed at changing U.S. policy in Vietnam. Similar teach-ins and academic protest events occurred across the country. Even before the teach-in, dissent in academia had been growing throughout early 1965. Hans Morgenthau, in an article for the *New Republic*, challenged the exclusive right of “liberty” over “communism” to the hearts of Asians. He wrote that liberty had won “the battle for the minds of men in Central and Western Europe” where “in popular aspiration political liberty has taken precedence over all other needs.” But, he added, Communism was bound to win

⁴⁶¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 706* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 23-28 April 1965), 7-10.

⁴⁶² McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*, 226-260.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

in Asia, where “its tenets of social, economic and political equality have appealed to people for whom the removal of inequality [sic] has been the most urgent aspiration.” This problem was compounded, Morgenthau admitted, by geography. Morgenthau wrote: “The restored power of China...makes an unanswerable case for Chinese influence in Asia.”⁴⁶⁵

In an April article in *New York Times* magazine, Morgenthau challenged the notion that the United States could contain China in the conventional sense. He wrote: “While China is obviously no match for the United States in over-all power, China is largely immune to the specific types of power in which the superiority of the United States consists.” He added, “To be defeated, China has to be conquered.”⁴⁶⁶ Morgenthau concluded:

Physical conquest would require the deployment of millions of American soldiers on the mainland of Asia. No American military leader has ever advocated a course of action so fraught with incalculable risks, so uncertain of outcome, requiring sacrifices so out of proportion to the interests at stake and the benefits to be expected.⁴⁶⁷

A gathering of Asian studies scholars in San Francisco on 2 April 1965 produced a petition to the President signed by dozens of scholars from across the United States. The petition expressed the concern of the scholars that the United States had “taken a dangerous step forward

⁴⁶⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Immaturity of Our Asian Policy: Ideological Windmills,” *New Republic*, 12 March 1965, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, “SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam,” 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁶⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, “We Are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam,” *New York Times Magazine*, 18 April 1965, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, “SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam,” 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁶⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, “We Are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam,” *New York Times Magazine*, 18 April 1965, excerpted in memorandum by William J. Jorden, for Chester L. Cooper, “SUBJECT: Views of Hans Morgenthau on U.S. Policy in Vietnam,” 14 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

through our policy of increasing escalation of the war, one which puts us on a direct collision course with China,” a war from which “Communist China, like the Soviet Union in the wake of World War II, would emerge stronger than before.”⁴⁶⁸ The scholars believed that the U.S. policy in Southeast Asia rested on “three questionable assumptions”:

First...that the Soviet Union will, in a showdown, not support Communist China, and that therefore American power can punish China with impunity.... Second...that China and North Vietnam, when confronted with punishing destruction, will surrender to force. The history of these two nations indicates just the opposite.... Third...that the existence of the war will create conditions for stability in South Vietnam, strengthen the South Vietnam army and create better conditions for winning the war in the South. The Viet Cong are powerful because of broad support from the Vietnamese peasantry, and because the latter have been alienated from the government by cruelty, impotence, and selfishness.⁴⁶⁹

These scholars insisted that U.S. policy in Southeast Asia was ultimately self-defeating because, while there were “‘doves’ and ‘hawks’ in Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow, just as in our own country,” their arguments were weakened by “the fear of America's implacable hostility against them.” These Asian experts believed that the United States could allay these fears by “calling off the bombing of North Vietnam and taking the lead in convening the Geneva Conference.” These scholars believed that such an action would rob the Communists of the moral high ground and “give America access to the allegiance of the poor countries of the world.”⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Conference of Asian Scholars, Petition to President Johnson on Vietnam policy dated 2 April 1965 with cover letter by Stanley Sheinbaum dated 13 April 1965, 13 April 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁶⁹ Conference of Asian Scholars, Petition to President Johnson on Vietnam policy dated 2 April 1965 with cover letter by Stanley Sheinbaum dated 13 April 1965, 13 April 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁷⁰ Conference of Asian Scholars, Petition to President Johnson on Vietnam policy dated 2 April 1965 with cover letter by Stanley Sheinbaum dated 13 April 1965, 13 April 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

On 1 May 1965, only days before his appearance at a Washington teach-in, Hans Morgenthau attacked the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam as making a negotiated settlement less likely and making Soviet intervention in the conflict more likely. In a *New Republic* article, Morgenthau wrote that the U.S. intervention in Vietnam was making it harder for “those who have been identified with Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful coexistence” to resist the calls for intervention from the Soviet “faction that favors the hard line of the Chinese.”⁴⁷¹ Morgenthau concluded:

The bombing of North Vietnam, a complete failure as an inducement to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table, is likely to succeed in bringing the Soviet Union to the battlefields of Southeast Asia.⁴⁷²

The Soviets wanted peaceful coexistence with the United States, Morgenthau wrote, but not at the cost of abdicating their position as leader of the world Communist movement to the Chinese.⁴⁷³

Academic support for the teach-in movement was not universal. Michael Hakeem, a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, wrote an angry letter to the editor of the *Bulletin of the Association of University Professors* about the teach-ins. Hakeem wrote that the professors involved in the teach-ins did not know the “differences between teaching and agitation, between scholarship and protest, between inquiry and propaganda.”

⁴⁷¹ Hans J. Morgenthau, “Russia, the U.S. and Vietnam,” *New Republic*, 1 May 1965, 12, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁷² Hans J. Morgenthau, “Russia, the U.S. and Vietnam,” *New Republic*, 1 May 1965, 12, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁷³ Hans J. Morgenthau, “Russia, the U.S. and Vietnam,” *New Republic*, 1 May 1965, 12, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Calling “the concept of a teach-in...a ludicrous contradiction in terms,” Hakeem wrote, “The teach-in at Wisconsin turned out to be, given the atmosphere and circumstances surrounding it, the only thing it could be: a brainwash-in.” Accusing teach-in organizers of “nightly ‘workshops’ in the Union to indoctrinate students,” Hakeem wrote that their goal was not teaching but “fanning the flames of hostility to the United States action in Vietnam.” The teach-ins, Hakeem wrote “were anything but neutral.” Hakeem added, “To cite but one example, a graduate student, in introducing a most distinguished professor of history, heatedly announced that the purpose of the teach-in was to denounce President Johnson for his ‘highhanded, immoral, and vicious’ attack on North Vietnam and for his flouting of the democratic process by going to war against the wishes of those Americans who oppose it.” Hakeem also condemned the emotional outbursts and jeering of those at the teach-ins who supported the administration’s policies in Vietnam, writing that “some professors pleaded for more ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ and a lesser emphasis on thinking in solving problems like Vietnam.” Hakeem concluded, “This was a program of evangelism rather than reflection, of demonstration rather than deliberation, of conviction rather than exploration.... In my opinion, the teach-in constitutes a species of intellectual fraud.”⁴⁷⁴

Perhaps the most visible teach-in was the National Teach-In in Washington, DC on 15 May 1965. This teach-in drew some of the biggest names in academia to speak against the growing war in Vietnam. Organized by the Inter-University Committee for a Public Hearing on Viet Nam in Ann Arbor, Michigan, significant excerpts from this teach-in were reprinted in the *New York Times*.

⁴⁷⁴ Michael Hakeem, letter to the editor of the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, 2 April 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

The letter of invitation for this Teach-In revealed that it was intended to oppose justifications for U.S. military intervention based on the containment of Communism, rather than justifications based on tit-for-tat retaliation or the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This letter described the event as part of a spontaneous movement spreading from campus to campus, a “mobilization of public protest unprecedented in the history of the Cold War,” brought on by “the escalation of the Vietnam War.” This letter billed the National Teach-In in Washington as the largest teach-in yet, “a confrontation between scholars and scientists on the one hand, and on the other, members of the government.” The letter promised that McGeorge Bundy would attend to “defend official policy” and that this “confrontation” between Bundy and a “reactor panel” would be telecast via telephone to universities across the country.⁴⁷⁵

In a later and more detailed draft of the itinerary for this National Teach-In, the event revealed itself to be even more a confrontation to the administration’s justifications for escalation based on the containment of Communism. Each panel was given a “keynote quotation,” an argument justifying US military intervention based on the ideology of military containment of Communism. Each quotation was then followed by a list of “general subject matter,” counter-contentions designed to discredit the initial quotation. For instance, the keynote quotation for the first panel was: “The first reality is that North Viet-Nam has attacked the independent nation of South Viet-Nam. Its object is total conquest.” Suggested topics of discussion for this panel included questioning “the relation of the Hanoi government to the Viet Cong and National Liberation Front.” In the second panel, the quotation was: “Over this war . . . is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China.” Pointed questions suggested as subject matter

⁴⁷⁵ The Inter-University Committee for a Public Hearing on Viet Nam, letter soliciting donations or participation in National Teach-in, Ann Arbor, MI, [May 1965], Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

included “What is the case against China?” and “What does it mean to ‘contain’ China?” In response to the administration’s invocation of the domino theory, a panel would ask questions such as “What impact would political settlement in Viet-Nam have on Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Burma?” Another panel would question the administration’s assertion that the United States was supporting the self-determination of South Vietnam by questioning “the effect of our military involvement, strategy and tactics on the goal of self-determination for the Vietnamese of the South” and “the treatment of South Vietnamese who oppose the war or who want negotiations.” A panel would examine whether the war in Vietnam was actually a “Civil War” and what really was the “relation of the communist party to the National Liberation Front.” A separate panel would ask: “What are the risks of war with China or the commitment of US ground troops in either South or North Viet-Nam? At what point do nuclear weapons become necessary?” Another panel would scrutinize the ideology of containment itself, questioning the perception of “communism as a monolithic aggressor.” One panel would question the United States’ claim that it fought in defense of freedom.⁴⁷⁶ The National Teach-In was designed as an assault on the administration’s arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on the ideology of military containment. Not surprisingly, soon after this revised agenda was published, McGeorge Bundy decided not to attend the National Teach-In, instead sending a written statement to be read to the attendees.

The teach-in itself was, as it had been billed, an organized attack on the administration’s use of containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. China scholar Mary Wright used her appearance at the National Teach-In to attack the administration’s

⁴⁷⁶ [Inter-University Committee for a Public Hearing on Viet Nam], “NATIONAL “TEACH-IN” ON VIET-NAM,” list of attendees and itinerary panel discussions, May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

use of the lessons of Munich—that aggression must be opposed early lest it grow. Wright called comparisons of Communist China “to the position of Hitler’s Germany or Imperial Japan...very dangerous intellectual exercises.” Instead, she insisted that the United States had “to accept the fact of the existence of Communist China” and “extricate ourselves where we are clearly not wanted militarily.” She concluded: “It’s almost the last moment to retreat in Vietnam and salvage something.”⁴⁷⁷

Prof. George Kahin first attacked administration dishonesty in escalating the war and accused the administration of attacking and discrediting its critics. Kahin charged: “Essential information has been withheld from the American public and crucial policy decisions concerning Southeast Asia have been made before the public has even been aware that a problem exists.” Moreover, Kahin charged that the administration was dismissing “even thoughtful criticism of Government policy as irresponsible meddling.” Citing a “a spokesman for newspaper editors,” Kahin said that “the American press in Vietnam faces stronger restrictions than it ever has in wartime and...we are getting contradictions, double-talk and half-truths from the Government concerning the situation in Vietnam.”⁴⁷⁸ Citing a *New York Times* editorial, he added,

High-ranking representatives of government in Washington and in Saigon have so obscured, confused or distorted the news from Vietnam or have made such fatuously erroneous evaluations about the course of the war that the credibility of the United States Government has been sacrificed.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Mary Wright, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁷⁸ George M. Kahin, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁷⁹ George M. Kahin, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

However, Kahin also attacked the administration's application of the ideology of military containment to the conflict in Vietnam. He said: "[the administration's] most consistent failure has been an inability both to appreciate the importance of Asian nationalism and to work with rather than against this powerful force." Attacking the administration's claim that it was continuing the policies of its predecessors over the previous ten years, Kahin cited all of the ways in which Johnson's policies differed with those of his predecessors. "Secretary Acheson in 1950," Kahin noted, "stated that America could not by itself create politically stable states in Asia."⁴⁸⁰ Kahin quoted President Kennedy as saying:

In the final analysis it's [their] war—they're the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, give them equipment. We can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it.⁴⁸¹

Kahin added that the "trend towards a rapprochement with Russia started by President Eisenhower and continued by President Kennedy" had "been seriously affected by our policy in Vietnam and it will be further undermined if we continue on our present course." Moreover, Kahin said, "The possibility of cooperation between the United States and Russia to contain China's power...is becoming ever more remote." Kahin also derided those who adhered to "the simplistic domino theory," saying that the other regimes of Southeast Asia would not "succumb to Communism" so long as they were "in harmony with their nation's nationalism [and] so long

⁴⁸⁰ George M. Kahin, "Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement," *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁸¹ George M. Kahin, "Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement," *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

as they are wise enough to meet the most pressing economic and social demands of their people.”⁴⁸²

Hans Morgenthau spoke in the National Teach-In in Washington of the “basic inner contradictions” in American policy toward Southeast Asia: that the United States had set “goals” in Asia “which cannot be achieved with the means we are willing to employ.” To achieve its stated goals in Asia, Morgenthau said, the administration “must be ready to go to war with China, with all that that implies.” While Morgenthau conceded that the administration wanted a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Vietnam, he said that the administration had imposed “unspoken conditions” that made “a negotiated settlement at the moment impossible,” including the administration’s refusal “to negotiate with the Vietcong” and its “implicit condition” that U.S. forces “remain—at least for the time being—in South Vietnam.” This self-defeating policy, Morgenthau concluded, played into Communist China’s hands. “From the point of view of Peking,” Morgenthau said, “nothing better could happen than the United States waging a war in Vietnam which it is not able to win and which it cannot afford to lose.” Morgenthau quipped: “Peking...hasn’t lost a single man in that conflict and has only lost, as far as we can tell, one gun, which Mr. McNamara showed the other day in a press conference.”⁴⁸³

Some scholars echoed the administration’s use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Eminent China scholar and Harvard professor John K. Fairbank originally agreed to defend U.S. policy in Vietnam at the National Teach-In. However, he ultimately did not appear and instead wrote a letter to the editors of the *Washington Post*.

⁴⁸² George M. Kahin, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁸³ Hans Morgenthau, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Fairbank wrote that the United States' "China-containment policy was... an out-of-date article." Still, he did not question the necessity to contain Chinese expansionism, only the present U.S. strategy to do so. He argued that, in addition to military means, the "problem...requires long-term action on the socio-political and diplomatic levels as well." Fairbank argued that the United States should permit Peking to enter the United Nations "to manipulate Chinese pride in our own interest under the slogan 'China should have her place in the world.'" Yet, he stated unequivocally, "We still have to pursue military containment in some form or other."⁴⁸⁴

University of California-Berkeley professor and East-Asia expert Robert Scalapino did appear at the National Teach-In to defend the administration's use of containment to justify its policies in Vietnam. In answer to the question "Is the Vietcong a truly indigenous force in South Vietnam and has it achieved its strength for its support such as it is through promoting socio-economic reform?" Scalapino provided a qualified "no." Scalapino said: "[The] Vietcong is a carbon copy of the Vietminh which preceded it." He added: "The real leaders of the Vietcong are, and have always been, those in small hard-core elements that are also members of the Communist party—and that party has Hanoi as its headquarters." To those who pointed out that "the Vietminh...until it came to power claimed to be a multiclass, multifront organization dedicated to national liberation of Vietnam," Scalapino answered: "It ended up as you well know under the domination of the Communist party and opponents were either liquidated, silenced or reformed."⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ John K. Fairbank, letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* in support of Vietnam policy, 11 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁸⁵ Robert Scalapino, "Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement," *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Scalapino also defended the Johnson administration's ongoing decision to escalate U.S. military intervention in the conflict in Vietnam. The only alternatives were, he said, "Withdrawal, negotiation, or escalation." In answer to those who suggested withdrawal, Scalapino answered, "It is not merely that withdrawal would reduce American credibility with her allies and neutrals round the world, but it is also that it would be a green light to the new national liberation movements which are even now getting under way.... Peking has broadcast repeatedly its intent to support the Thai national liberation movement." Likewise, Scalapino argued, withdrawal would give China the upper hand in its argument with the Soviet Union over peaceful coexistence. "Withdrawal would prove that Peking was right," Scalapino said, "and make it virtually impossible for moderation to prevail inside the world Communist movement." Scalapino also argued that negotiation was an unrealistic option, saying that, while "we are still hoping that...Hanoi will come forward and break its tie, now more than two years old, with Peking and move into a new orbit of independence," the Chinese had to date rebuffed offers of negotiation.⁴⁸⁶

Answering a challenge from Professor Kahin that the United States was suppressing nationalism in South Vietnam, Scalapino argued: "The pressures which Communist China is putting upon the small neutralist countries today—unless they are counteracted by some balance of power in this region—will be antinationalist and increasingly satellite in character." Scalapino added: "Unless we can establish some balance of power in Asia, nationalism is going to go under in societies like Cambodia, it's going to go under in societies like Burma." Scalapino concluded, "The inexorable pressure of the big states that are just emerging now, of which China is one but

⁴⁸⁶ Robert Scalapino, "Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement," *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

not the only one, is going to submerge indigenous Asian nationalism in its own concept...and its own self-interest.”⁴⁸⁷

Likewise answering a challenge from Professor Morgenthau that Scalapino’s logic led inexorably to war with China or withdrawal, Scalapino answered: “I would say that withdrawal at this point will mean war...because I think it will inevitably settle, at least for the time being, the issue of how to meet American imperialism as the Communists put it.” This would, Scalapino concluded, “inevitably cause the launching not of a thousand ships, but a thousand revolts not just in Asia, but wherever this movement can get under way. And I think that that means war.”⁴⁸⁸

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, political science professor at Columbia University and future National Security Advisor to President Carter, also defended the Johnson administration’s policy on Vietnam at the National Teach-In. In doing so, he used the ideology of military containment. Brzezinski argued that the United States must retain a military presence in Southeast Asia in order to have a voice in “the nature of change, of social reform, whether it will be by evolution or by more rapid, coercive, indeed violent means.” Brzezinski echoed the administration’s claims that its motives were altruistic in Southeast Asia. “We are not trying to overthrow the North Vietnamese government,” Brzezinski said, “We are not trying to change an existing political situation.” To those who argued that China should have hegemony in Asia because “China is the predominant power in the region,”⁴⁸⁹ Brzezinski offered a variation on the lessons of Munich:

⁴⁸⁷ Robert Scalapino, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁸⁸ Robert Scalapino, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁸⁹ Hans Morgenthau, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

So was Japan in 1940. Does that mean we should not have taken the course we did? So was Germany in Europe in 1940. So was the Soviet Union in Europe in 1945-46. Yet this did not justify the conclusion that one should therefore disengage and in a self-fulfilling prophecy make right the assertion...that China is the predominant power and prove it by disengaging.⁴⁹⁰

Brzezinski concluded by answering those who said the President was ignoring offers of negotiation on Vietnam. “None of these proposals have been accepted,” Brzezinski said, “because at the present time the other side makes a demand which involves a qualitative change in the political status quo.”⁴⁹¹

In his written statement, to be read to attendees at the National Teach-In, McGeorge Bundy supported the right of Americans to dissent, while minimizing the impact or import of that dissent. He began: “It has been argued that debate of this kind should be avoided because it can give encouragement to the adversaries of our country.” Further, he admitted, “There is some ground for this argument, since it is true that Communists have little understanding of the meaning of debate in a free society.” Bundy added that the Chinese claim and perhaps believe “that American policy is weaker because 700 faculty members have made a protest against our policy in Vietnam.” However, he wrote, “The American people...know that those who are protesting are only a minority, indeed a small minority, of the American teachers and students.” And, further, “within that minority the great majority accept and respect the rights and duty of the American Administration to meet its constitutional responsibilities for the conduct of our

⁴⁹⁰ Hans Morgenthau, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁹¹ Hans Morgenthau, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

foreign affairs.”⁴⁹² Bundy also suggested that some present at the National Teach-In were “more interested in pressure upon the Administration than in fair discussion with its representatives.”⁴⁹³ But Bundy still accepted the right of Americans to dissent, writing, “The American people know that the real day of danger will come when we are afraid of any unpopular minority or unwilling to reply to its voices.... Open discussion between our citizens and their government is the central nervous system of our free society,” even if it did help “the propaganda of totalitarians.”⁴⁹⁴

Still, Bundy insisted, the American purpose in Vietnam was justified by the ideology of military containment of Communism. “Our purpose there,” Bundy wrote, “is peace for the people of Vietnam, the people of Southeast Asia, and the people of the United States.”⁴⁹⁵ Bundy claimed that his differences with the attendees were over “the nature of the politics of Asia...the legitimacy of force in the face of armed attack and...the true prospects and purposes of the people of Vietnam themselves.” Still, Bundy insisted, “the Administration which now bears responsibility for the conduct of our foreign affairs does not admire force for its own sake, or ‘brinkmanship’ of any sort.”⁴⁹⁶ Bundy also tried to construct some common ground between the dissenters and the administration: “None of us wants the war to be enlarged. All of us want a

⁴⁹² McGeorge Bundy, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁹³ McGeorge Bundy, written statement to Teach-In, “Text of Statement by McGeorge Bundy,” 15 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁹⁴ McGeorge Bundy, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁹⁵ McGeorge Bundy, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁹⁶ McGeorge Bundy, written statement to Teach-In, “Text of Statement by McGeorge Bundy,” 15 May 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

decent settlement.” But, from this point, he departed into territory where many of the academics at the National Teach-In would not follow: “All of us seek a solution in which American troops can be honorably withdrawn.... All of us, I trust, are prepared to be steadfast in the pursuit of our purposes.”⁴⁹⁷

The administration was very concerned—perhaps more concerned than the actual threat academic dissent warranted—about the growing dissent in the academic community. This concern spawned two separate administration initiatives to counter dissent on college campuses. The first enterprise was called “Target: College Campus.”⁴⁹⁸ Among this project’s efforts was a program of outreach to college campuses, a number of “regional seminars” at college campuses for public discussions with professors. Plans for this program were eventually expanded to include a “National Seminar” where either William Bundy or McGeorge Bundy would confront “leading academic critics.”⁴⁹⁹ This final initiative was co-opted by the National Teach-In in May at which McGeorge Bundy ultimately declined to appear.

The Public Affairs Bureau of the State Department spearheaded a broader program which would outsource the role of informing the American public about Vietnam to the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV).⁵⁰⁰ The State Department was most hopeful about the work the AFV would do on college campuses. When presented to the President, the entire AFV initiative was

⁴⁹⁷ McGeorge Bundy, “Excerpts From National Teach-In on Vietnam Policy and Text of Bundy Statement,” *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, 30, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁴⁹⁸ Jack Valenti, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy about college campus campaign, 23 April 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁴⁹⁹ White House, strategy document for college campus campaign, April 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁰⁰ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Jack Valenti, “SUBJECT: The American Friends of Vietnam Program,” 5 May 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

described as a “counter-offensive moving on college campuses to combat the ‘get out of Viet Nam’ beatniks,” an effort led by a White House “counter-force, American Friends of Viet Nam, run by ‘good’ college professors.”⁵⁰¹ The State Department also hoped to help the AFV organize “perhaps a dozen community/university seminars throughout the country, under joint sponsorship with local World Affairs Councils.”⁵⁰²

After the National Teach-In, the effort to stage a pro-administration event at Michigan State University moved into high gear. The final event that resulted from this effort occurred on 1 June 1965 with USIA director Carl Rowan and Vice President Hubert Humphrey as the administration’s representatives and reiterated the administration’s use of containment to justify intervention in Vietnam.⁵⁰³ Chester Cooper wrote to Jack Valenti: “The large student audience was friendly and receptive to the Vice President’s vigorous exposition of our Vietnam policy and to Rowan’s exhortation for students to involve themselves constructively in the great causes of our time, specifically our effort to preserve Vietnamese independence.”⁵⁰⁴ However, the event garnered little news coverage compared to the National Teach-In.

In fact, neither this AFV event nor the teach-in movement had significant impact on the American public. Johnson was able to hold mainstream support for his Vietnam policy;

⁵⁰¹ Jack Valenti, memorandum for President Johnson on AFV college campus campaign, 7 May 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁰² Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Jack Valenti, “SUBJECT: The American Friends of Vietnam Program,” 5 May 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁰³ Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle over Vietnam* (Oakland, CA: University of California, 1994), 34.

⁵⁰⁴ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Jack Valenti, “SUBJECT: The American Friends of Vietnam Program,” 7 June 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

throughout the period when the teach-ins were taking place, 66 percent of Americans still wanted the U.S. to stay on its present course in Vietnam.⁵⁰⁵

U.S. Army in Vietnam

Escalation of air attacks and increases in the deployment of U.S. ground forces accelerated dramatically after Johnson's 7 April 1965 John Hopkins speech. May brought a renewed summer offensive from the Viet Cong.⁵⁰⁶ As the offensive intensified, the stability of the government of South Vietnam came increasingly into question.⁵⁰⁷ To halt the Viet Cong's progress, the President authorized the deployment of U.S. Army ground forces.⁵⁰⁸ Public attention temporarily turned to the Dominican Republic after a crisis there necessitated the deployment of Marines.⁵⁰⁹ Yet escalation in Vietnam continued unabated throughout the crisis. In June, as the Dominican crisis faded from the headlines, the President authorized the first B-52 strikes against Viet Cong positions inside South Vietnam and the deployment of the U.S. Army airmobile division.⁵¹⁰ Finally, after a highly publicized visit by Robert McNamara to South Vietnam and consultation with Congressional leaders, the President announced in a noontime press conference in late July his decision to raise the number of troops in Vietnam to 125,000, with an additional 100,000 possible in the future.⁵¹¹

Throughout this period, the administration continued used containment to justify its escalation of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Tit-for-tat justifications and invocations of

⁵⁰⁵ Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 114-116; Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, 100.

⁵⁰⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 432-450.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 432-450.

the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a legal justification for escalation had virtually disappeared from the administrations rhetoric. Radical protesters became more vocal during this period, attacking the ideology of containment and its application to Vietnam, while at least one academic questioned the administration's claim that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution gave it legal justification to escalate the war. The administration dismissed all of these objections and continued with its escalation of the war.

While Senator J. William Fulbright was the only Member of Congress to mount significant public dissent against the escalation during this period, a number of key Members of Congress shared their private doubts about escalation with the President. Both public and private Congressional dissent was critical of the President's use of containment to justify the growing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The administration's dismissive reaction to this dissent is at least strong circumstantial evidence that the President believed that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution gave him an ironclad insurance policy against these objections.

While the American public continued to strongly support the administration's use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, the President's handling of the war in Vietnam, and the use of bombing to assist South Vietnam, the administration never successfully built a consensus among the American people behind the introduction of large numbers of ground troops in Vietnam before they took this final move.

On 4 May 1965, the President used the military containment of Communism to justify escalation when addressing members of Congress at the White House during the signing of a supplemental appropriations bill for the war in Vietnam. Answering those who still wondered why the defense of South Vietnam was an American responsibility, the President answered: "There is no one else who can do the job. Our power alone, in the final test, can stand between

expanding communism and independent Asian nations.” The President argued that the United States must honor its commitment, especially since the Communists were deliberately trying “to show that American commitment is worthless...and once they succeed in doing that, the gates are down and the road is open to expansion and to endless conquest.” The President concluded by claiming before the Congressmen that the “1954...Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty... committed us to act to meet aggression against South Viet-Nam.”⁵¹²

This speech was part of a concerted campaign by the administration in May to press the administration’s claim that containment required U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. A few days later, Secretary of State Dean Rusk spoke to the American Society of International Law and provided many of the same justifications.⁵¹³ George Ball reminded ministers of the lessons of Munich at the opening session of a meeting of the SEATO council ministers in London on 3 May 1965.⁵¹⁴ On 13 May 1965, the first day of the bombing pause, the President spoke to the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists and again placed the blame for the continued

⁵¹² Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks by President Johnson at White house Before House and Senate Committees on May 4, 1965, ‘Congress Approves Supplemental Appropriation for Vietnam,’ Department of State Bulletin, May 24, 1965, p. 817,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-41-42, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵¹³ Dean Rusk, “Address by Secretary Rusk, Made Before the American Society of International Law on April 23, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, May 10, 1965, p. 697,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-38-39, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵¹⁴ George Ball, “Statement by Secretary Ball on May 3, 1965 at the Opening Session of the SEATO Council Ministers’ 10th Meeting at London, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, p. 922,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-41, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

conflict on China.⁵¹⁵ On the same day, in a speech to the Dallas Council on World Affairs, William P. Bundy blamed both the Soviet Union and Communist China for prolonging the conflict.⁵¹⁶ Nearly all of these speeches also warned of the dangers of the new Communist strategy of “wars of liberation.”

Many media commentators echoed the administration’s use of containment to justify escalation. Associated Press columnist James Marlow wrote in early May that the United States was “trying to prevent a Communist victory [in South Vietnam] in the belief it would lead eventually to Chinese domination of all Southeast Asia.” Marlow went on to write that this fear was not unfounded since “China will have the H-bomb in two or three years” and could be expected to behave as the United States had “in the Western Hemisphere [with the Monroe doctrine]” and “Soviet Russia [does] with its satellites now.” Echoing another of the administration’s themes, Marlow wrote: “When some of the old and original leaders of Chinese Communism, like Mao Tze-tung, pass out of the picture and the Chinese society becomes more affluent, the Communist missionary fervor may lose some steam, as it seems to have done in Russia.” However, Marlow warned, “The national interests of Red China will not diminish under a new leadership or under less ideological zeal.”⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Viet-Nam: The Third Face of War,” Address made to Association of American Editorial Cartoonists at the White House, 13 May 1965, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 116, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵¹⁶ William P. Bundy, “Address by William P. Bundy Before Dallas Council on World Affairs on May 13, 1965, ‘Reality and Myth Concerning South Vietnam,’ Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, p. 893,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D-- The Johnson Administration, D-44-45, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵¹⁷ James Marlow, “Viet Nam Conflict May Prove Only Minor Prelude to Big Act,” Associated Press, *Fort Scott Tribune*, Fort Scott, KS, 21 May 1965, 2.

In the midst of the bombing pause and the distraction of the Dominican crisis, Americans lost some interest in Vietnam. A Gallup Poll from mid-May found that more Americans continued to see Vietnam as “the most important problem facing this country today” than any other issue. But fewer Americans (22 percent) saw it as the most important issue compared to February (a drop of six percentage points). Two thirds of that slip had come at the expense of the “Dominican Republic” which four percent of Americans now believed was the “most important issue.”⁵¹⁸

The President and the administration had also lost ground in convincing Americans that ground troops were needed in Vietnam. A Gallup Poll from mid-May showed that only 30 percent of Americans wanted to “send in more troops” or wage “all-out war” in Vietnam, down five percentage points from late April. The number of Americans who wanted to “continue [the] present policy” in Vietnam had increased by seven percentage points to 29 percent during the same period. Perhaps the only good news for the administration was that the number of Americans who wanted to “withdraw troops” from Vietnam was down by three percentage points to 17 percent.⁵¹⁹

Radical activist protests against U.S. policy in Vietnam began to increase in volume during the late spring 1965. Paul Potter, president of the Students for a Democratic Society, attacked both the growing Vietnam War and the broader ideology of containment in a speech to demonstrators at the Washington Monument during a march on Washington on 17 April 1965. Potter claimed that Vietnam had “finally severed the last vestiges of illusion that morality and

⁵¹⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1965-0711: Johnson/Vietnam/Dominican Republican/Labor Unions/Political Parties* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 13-18 May 1965), 6-8.

⁵¹⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1965-0711: Johnson/Vietnam/Dominican Republican/Labor Unions/Political Parties* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 13-18 May 1965), 9-11.

democracy are the guiding principles of American foreign policy.” America had revealed its imperialism, Potter said, through “saccharine, self-righteous moralism that promises the Vietnamese a billion dollars of economic aid at the very moment we are delivering billions for economic and social destruction and political repression.” Paraphrasing Senator Wayne Morse, Potter added, “The U.S. may well be the greatest threat to peace in the world today.” Potter condemned the United States for repressing “the demand of ordinary people to have some opportunity to make their own lives,” while insisting “that that struggle can be legitimately suppressed since it might lead to the development of a Communist system.” The United States’ effort to suppress the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people, Potter said, was ultimately self-defeating. “The war that we are creating and escalating in Southeast Asia is rapidly eroding the base of independence of North Vietnam as it is forced to turn to China and the Soviet Union.”⁵²⁰ Potter concluded by striking at the ideology of military containment itself. Potter insisted: “This country must come to understand that the creation of a Communist country in the world today is not an ultimate defeat.”⁵²¹

The May 2nd Movement was a self-described “radical...outgrowth...formed at a socialist conference at Yale University during March 1964.”⁵²² In spring 1965, their 1964 “We Won’t

⁵²⁰ Paul Potter, “The Incredible War,” excerpts from 17 April 1965 speech, published in *National Guardian*, 29 April 1965, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 228-230.

⁵²¹ Paul Potter, “The Incredible War,” excerpts from 17 April 1965 speech, published in *National Guardian*, 29 April 1965, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 229-230.

⁵²² May 2nd Movement, “It is not enough to be for peace...” *Progressive Labor* Special Issue, December 1964, <http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/may-2-statement.htm>, accessed 16 March 2014.

Go” statement in protest of the draft for service in Vietnam was reprinted in the more broad-based activist newsletter, the *National Guardian*.⁵²³ Their statement proclaimed:

Believing that United States' participation in that war is for the suppression of the Vietnamese struggle for national independence, we see no justification for our involvement. We agree with Senator Wayne Morse, who said on the floor of the Senate on March 4, 1964, regarding South Vietnam, that “We should never have gone in. We should never have stayed in. We should get out.”⁵²⁴

None of these radical activists attacked tit-for-tat retaliation or the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a justification for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. This is not surprising since, by this time, the administration hardly mentioned either as a justification.

Perhaps in response to growing dissent in academia over the escalation of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, William Bundy appeared at the end of May before the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley to explain the administration’s reasons for escalating the conflict. Bundy admitted that Eisenhower and Kennedy had not used U.S. forces in direct combat in Vietnam, but he painted Johnson’s escalation of U.S. participation in the conflict as a continuation of their policies. Further, he claimed that this escalation was necessitated by the actions of North Vietnam.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ May Second Movement, “‘We Won't Go’ Statement,” Spring 1964, in *National Guardian*, 29 April 1965, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 228.

⁵²⁴ May Second Movement, “‘We Won't Go’ Statement,” Spring 1964, in *National Guardian*, 29 April 1965, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 228.

⁵²⁵ William P. Bundy, “Address by William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Before the Faculty Forum of the University of California at Berkeley on May 27, 1965, ‘A Perspective on U.S. Policy in Vietnam,’ Department of State Bulletin, June 21, 1965, p. 1001,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-48,

Bundy also repeated many of the themes the administration had been using since early 1964. Bundy blamed the conflict in Vietnam on China, “a Communist regime still at the peak of its ideological fervor,” which sought “domination and the denial of national self-determination and independence.” Bundy did concede that “the other Communist nations of Asia, North Vietnam and North Korea... are not true satellites—indeed deep down, they too fear Chinese domination.” However, he still called them “willing partners...working together with Communist China toward...subjugation of the true national independence of smaller countries.” Likewise, while admitting that the Communist regime in North Vietnam “was a genuine nationalist movement,” Bundy also insisted that the “dividing line between the two Viet-Nams” was every bit as valid a “political division as in Germany and Korea.” Moreover, Bundy said, the North Vietnamese regime was “the heartbeat of the Viet Cong.” Comparing the Viet Cong insurgency to the insurgency in Greece, Bundy added: “The Viet Cong have won control of major areas of the country, playing in part on propaganda and the undoubted weaknesses of Diem and his successors, but relying basically on massive intimidation of civilians.”⁵²⁶

At an appearance in Chicago in June 1965, the President returned to the lessons of Munich. “In the 1930’s,” Johnson said, “we made our fate not by what we did but what we Americans failed to do.” American “vacillation...hesitancy and irresolution” had “propelled...all

National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵²⁶ William P. Bundy, “Address by William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Before the Faculty Forum of the University of California at Berkeley on May 27, 1965, ‘A Perspective on U.S. Policy in Vietnam,’ Department of State Bulletin, June 21, 1965, p. 1001,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-46-48, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

mankind toward tragedy.” Johnson concluded: “The failure of free men in the 1930’s was not of the sword but of the soul.” He insisted: “There just must be no such failure in the 1960’s.”⁵²⁷

The botched announcement of the deployment of U.S. Army soldiers to Vietnam in June 1965, caused some in the press to criticize the administration’s transparency in escalating the war. On 8 June 1965, Assistant Secretary of State Robert McCloskey told reporters in a routine press conference that the new U.S. forces being deployed to Vietnam would be used for offensive operations.⁵²⁸ The *New York Times* editorial page exploded, with one stunned editor writing, “The American people were told by a minor State Department official yesterday, that, in effect, they were in a land war on the continent of Asia.”⁵²⁹ I.F. Stone immediately began calling the growing war in Vietnam “McCloskey’s war.” However, Stone’s real critique on this occasion was not Presidential credibility but the containment arguments for military intervention in Vietnam. Stone called it “folly” to “tie down a major portion of U.S. military power in a minor theater of conflict.”⁵³⁰ Recalling Walter Lippmann’s arguments about a misguided “white man’s burden” in South Vietnam from April,⁵³¹ Stone wrote that “white men will be fighting colored men in an effort to put down a rebellion so deeply rooted that it has gone on for two decades.”

⁵²⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by President Johnson in Chicago, Illinois on June 3, 1965, ‘The Peace of Mankind,’ Department of State Bulletin, June 21, 1965, p. 987,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-48-49, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵²⁸ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 290-291; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 433.

⁵²⁹ New York Times, “Ground War in Asia,” *New York Times*, 9 June 1965, 46.

⁵³⁰ I.F. Stone, “Lyndon Johnson Lets the Office Boy Declare War,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, 9 June 1965, reprinted in *The Best of I.F. Stone*, by I.F. Stone, ed. By Karl Weber (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 258.

⁵³¹ Walter Lippmann, “Asians Resent White Man’s Intrusion in Viet War,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 23 April 1965, 14.

Stone added that this rebellion had already “extended its power steadily during the four years in which we trained, directed and supplied a satellite native army.”⁵³²

Dissent against the growing commitment in Vietnam continued to grow in academia as well; and this dissent also focused on attacking the administration’s use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. In a journal article in the June edition of *Commentary*, Maurice J. Goldbloom lamented the loss of American prestige that had occurred from what he claimed was its zenith in autumn 1963. Goldbloom wrote: “There was a general expectation on the part of friend and foe alike” that American power would be “used with reason and restraint” and “in the interest of justice and human dignity.” Less than two years later, Goldbloom claimed, “the international prestige of the United States is lower than at any time within recent memory” because American power was being used “as the instrument of willful and irrational caprice, a destructive force mightier than the earthquake and with no more intelligent direction.”⁵³³

However, Maurice Goldbloom was also one of the few opponents of the administration’s policies in Vietnam to attack its credibility. Goldbloom took on the administration’s repeated claim that it was simply continuing its predecessors’ policies:

The administration [is] less than ingenuous in claiming to be merely carrying out in Vietnam the policies of its last two predecessors.... American intervention under Eisenhower was limited in scope and reasonable in intent.⁵³⁴

⁵³² I.F. Stone, “Lyndon Johnson Lets the Office Boy Declare War,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, 9 June 1965, reprinted in *The Best of I.F. Stone*, by I.F. Stone, ed. By Karl Weber (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 258.

⁵³³ Maurice J. Goldbloom, “Johnson So Far III: Foreign Policy,” American Jewish Committee, *Commentary*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1965): 47-55, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁵³⁴ Maurice J. Goldbloom, “Johnson So Far III: Foreign Policy,” American Jewish Committee, *Commentary*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1965): 47-55, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

Goldbloom also joined John Kenneth Galbraith's attack on the administration's claims that it sought peace. Goldbloom wrote that the President had rejected North Vietnam's offer of bilateral negotiations at the beginning of 1965 and, "instead, it prepared to intensify the war...by bombing North Vietnam."

Goldbloom even took on the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution directly. Goldbloom questioned the reliability of the administration's account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, saying "the Navy, on the basis of some rather ambiguous radar blips, reported that two of its destroyers had been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats." Goldbloom also questioned "the facts in regard to the attack." His primary attack, however, was on the legality of the reprisals—which Goldbloom claimed "constituted aggression under international law"—and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—which Goldbloom claimed was unconstitutional on the basis of Supreme Court case law establishing that "Congress cannot, by sweeping delegation of authority to the executive, constitutionally divest itself of powers," especially war-making powers.⁵³⁵

However, after Goldbloom's attack on the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the legality of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Goldbloom joined the vast majority of critics in attacking the administration's adherence to the ideology of containment. Goldbloom described the administration's approach as "Achesonism... a frank advocacy of *Realpolitik* in its grosser forms." Goldbloom called this immoral foreign policy paradigm a form of "devil worship"; the logic for Achesonism was that "the Communists use immoral means. The Communists are successful, therefore immoral means bring success and we on our side must not hesitate to use

⁵³⁵ Maurice J. Goldbloom, "Johnson So Far III: Foreign Policy," American Jewish Committee, *Commentary*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1965): 47-55, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

them.” Goldbloom concluded: “Morality without power may end in frustration, but power which disregards morality is monstrous—and usually ends by destroying its own basis.”⁵³⁶

Despite all of his criticisms, Goldbloom still rejected “immediate and unconditional withdrawal” on the grounds that it would leave U.S. allies in South Vietnam at the mercy of the brutality of Ho Chi Minh. Yet Goldbloom posited that this concern called for “a limited holding operation, not escalation of the war.”⁵³⁷

Even throughout the dramatic news of U.S. troop movements in Vietnam⁵³⁸—and despite continued growing criticism from academics, activists, and the media—Americans continued to support the President’s policies in Vietnam. A White House poll of likely voters in Minnesota—home state of both Vice President Hubert Humphrey and future antiwar Presidential candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy—found that, while Minnesotans did not consider Vietnam the “most important” issue (it came in second to “help for old people”), 52 percent had a favorable opinion of the President’s “handling [of] the problem in Vietnam.” Almost as many, 51 percent, had a favorable opinion of his “handling [of] Communist China,” while 60 percent had a favorable opinion of his “handling [of] Russia and her leaders.” Moreover, Minnesotans believed that the President should either continue his present course or escalate further. When asked what

⁵³⁶ Maurice J. Goldbloom, “Johnson So Far III: Foreign Policy,” American Jewish Committee, *Commentary*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1965): 47-55, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

⁵³⁷ Maurice J. Goldbloom, “Johnson So Far III: Foreign Policy,” American Jewish Committee, *Commentary*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June 1965): 47-55, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

⁵³⁸ John W. Finney, “U.S. Adding 21,000 to Vietnam Force, M’Namara Says,” *New York Times*, 17 June 1965, 1; *New York Times*, “U.S. Troops Open First Big Attack Against Vietcong,” *New York Times*, 30 June 1965, 1; Fred S. Hoffman, “New Air Mobile Units May Fight in Vietnam,” Associated Press, *Milwaukee Journal*, 17 June 1965, 2; *Time*, “The Airmobile Division,” *Time*, 25 June 1965, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,833759,00.html> (accessed 26 October 2008).

America should do next in Vietnam, the greatest number of respondents, 78 percent, agreed that America should “do as [it is], keep military pressure on but seek negotiation,” while 56 percent agreed with the statement that America “should step up [its] military even more and win the war.” By contrast, only 25 percent agreed that America should “stop U.S. bombing attacks” and only 10 percent agreed that America should “forget the whole thing and clear out.” Seventy percent of Minnesotans agreed that the United States should “ask for negotiation right now,” but this was probably received by the White House much as it was by the pollsters in their comments; their response was, “We have.” Given these results, pollsters concluded, “The people of Minnesota are solidly behind the President.”⁵³⁹ Polling in New York from the same period found nearly identical results.⁵⁴⁰

Not only did Americans agree with the present course in Vietnam, they accepted many of the President’s use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. A National Gallup Poll from this same period asked those who believed the United States should continue its present course in Vietnam (63 percent of respondents) why they believed the United States should stay the course. Over half of respondents accepted some variation on the administration’s argument that the United States had to win in Vietnam to maintain the credibility of its worldwide commitments. Another 40 percent explicitly accepted the contention that the United States had to stand firm in Vietnam to “contain Communism.” By contrast, none of those respondents who believed that America should “pull

⁵³⁹ Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN MINNESOTA, Study #255,” Bronxville, NY, June 1965, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [1 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁴⁰ Oliver Quayle and Company, “A SURVEY OF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN NEW YORKN CITY, Post Election Wave II, Study #251,” Bronxville, NY, June 1965, box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [1 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

out” of Vietnam (23 percent) cited reasons that had been posited by dissident academics and other vocal opponents of the administration’s policies in Vietnam. Thirty-one percent of those respondents who wanted Americans out of Vietnam cited high U.S. casualties. Just as many believed that Vietnam was “none of our business,” while half as many (17 percent) believed that Vietnam was “a losing cause” or that the United States was “not getting anywhere” in winning the war.⁵⁴¹

A Harris Poll a week later showed that the majority of Americans supported the President (69 percent) and his course in Vietnam. Yet support for introducing more U.S. ground troop in Vietnam was not nearly as strong. Only 47 percent of Americans believed the President should “send more troops,” while nearly a quarter of Americans were still “not sure” whether the United States should send more troops. Lou Harris’ conclusion was that this represented “a clear mandate for the President's course of action.”⁵⁴² In reality, these results only indicated support for the state of the escalation at that moment; they did not necessarily indicate that the American public would continue to support the President’s policy if he introduced large numbers of U.S. ground troops into the conflict. The administration had more work to do to convince the American public.

This conclusion is supported by a National Opinion Research Center poll from June 1965. This poll found that 68 percent of Americans were following the situation in Vietnam “very” or “fairly closely.” Of those who were paying attention to Vietnam at all, only 46 percent were “completely satisfied” with “the way President Johnson is handling the war in Vietnam,”

⁵⁴¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 712* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 4-9 June 1965), 8-9.

⁵⁴² [Hayes Redmond], note containing unpublished Harris Poll numbers for Vietnam, 17 June 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [4 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

while 43 percent said they were not satisfied with “some things.” Of those who had some reservations about Johnson’s policies in Vietnam, only 47 percent wanted the President to escalate the conflict further. In other words, according to this poll, only 20 percent of Americans overall wanted the President to further escalate the conflict, less than half as many as were “completely satisfied” with the President’s actions thus far. When asked specifically about the bombing of North Vietnam, 77 percent of Americans supported the bombing. Of those Americans who supported the bombing, slightly fewer believed the bombing should be escalated than believed the current level of bombing was about correct.⁵⁴³

The conclusion that Americans were not convinced that more U.S. ground troops were needed in Vietnam is even more dramatically illustrated by a Gallup Poll from the beginning of June. The administration had made progress; over a third of respondents now believed that the United States should either “send in more troops” or wage “all-out war” in Vietnam, an increase of five percentage points from mid-May. However, this was simply a return to the levels of late April, before the Dominican crisis. This gain came at the cost of those Americans who wanted to “continue [the] present policy” in Vietnam, now 24 percent of Americans, a decrease of five percentage points from mid-May. More worrisome for the administration, 20 percent of Americans now wanted to “withdraw troops” from Vietnam, an increase of three percentage points from mid-May. The administration was no closer to convincing Americans that large numbers of U.S. ground troops were needed in Vietnam than it had been in mid-April.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ National Opinion Research Center, *NORC Amalgam Study # 857* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, June 1965), 18-20.

⁵⁴⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 712* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 4-9 June 1965), 6-8.

As part of the administration's continuing effort to mute academic dissent, McGeorge Bundy agreed to a nationally televised debate with foreign policy luminary Hans Morgenthau on 21 June 1965.⁵⁴⁵ Chester Cooper was intimately involved in this televised debate. Both Bundy and Cooper saw the effort as an attempt to redress McGeorge Bundy's absence from the National Teach-In. The appearance was specifically targeted to "cope with the ferment over Vietnam in the university and intellectual sectors." Bundy would appear "with prominent and respected scholars and intellectuals." However, the appearance would not be "a re-run of the May 15 [National] teach-in." Cooper attempted to tailor the format of the program to ensure that it would not result in "further polarizing and hardening the Vietnam issue with the Administration's critics."⁵⁴⁶ Despite his best efforts, Chester Cooper was unable to exclude Morgenthau from the event.⁵⁴⁷ The President was incensed with the resulting debate,⁵⁴⁸ probably due to Bundy's poor showing in the face of Morgenthau's challenges to the administration's policies.

In late June, at the persistent urging of Harry Sions, former war correspondent and editor at Little, Brown, and Company,⁵⁴⁹ Senator J. William Fulbright finally spoke out publicly against

⁵⁴⁵ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 367-369.

⁵⁴⁶ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Jack Valenti, "SUBJECT: The American Friends of Vietnam Program," 7 June 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁴⁷ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy on a possible second "Teach-In," "SUBJECT: Teach-In, Chapter 2," 4 June 1965, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, McGeorge Bundy May-June 1965 Teach-In, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁴⁸ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 367-369.

⁵⁴⁹ Harry Sions, Little, Brown and Company, letter to J. William Fulbright about foreign policy debate, 14 May 1965, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR); J. William Fulbright, letter to Harry Sions of Little, Brown and Company about foreign policy debate, 2 June 1965, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR); Harry Sions, Little, Brown and Company, second letter to J. William Fulbright about foreign policy debate, 15 June 1965, Series

the President's policies in Vietnam. While he did not explicitly denounce the President in his appearance on the *Today* Show, Fulbright told Americans it was time to stop the growing U.S. military commitment in Vietnam before it could no longer be stopped. Fulbright's office received 178 letters supporting Fulbright's position in the few days after the appearance, and only 24 letters opposed (though the two letters from Fulbright's home state of Arkansas were split evenly between support and opposition).⁵⁵⁰

While it generated a number of letters to Fulbright's office, this modest dissent against escalation had little effect on public opinion. A Gallup Poll from late June showed almost no change in American public approval of President Johnson's "dealing with the situation in Vietnam" (63 percent). The answers from these Americans as to why they approved of the President's handling of the war revealed a deep faith in the wisdom of the government and reluctance to question authority. Nearly 40 percent simply answered that the President "knows best" or "knows more about" the problem in Vietnam than the public. Another 25 percent had fully embraced the President's justification for U.S. military intervention, responding that "we must contain Communism." Sixteen percent echoed the administration's argument that the United States must succeed in Vietnam in order to protect the credibility of its commitments across the globe. Of those 36 percent who disapproved of the President's handling of Vietnam, nearly a quarter disapproved because they thought the President was not being aggressive

48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁵⁵⁰ Carl Marcy, "SUBJECT: Your Vietnam speech and appearance on the Today program," internal memo from Carl Marcy to Senator J. William Fulbright about public response to the Senator's *Today* appearance, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 22 June 1965, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 2, 1964-1965, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

enough. None of the respondents echoed arguments made by opponents of the President's policies in Vietnam.⁵⁵¹

While the conventional wisdom today is that the American public abandoned the President on the issue of Vietnam because they expected a quick victory, this same poll shows that most Americans expected the United States to be no closer to victory in June 1966 than it was in June 1965. In fact, many Americans expected the war to be going much worse than it actually would be going in mid-1966. When asked in late June 1965 what they expected the war to look like in a year, only 35 percent of respondents expected “a military victory” or “a compromise peace...and fighting will have ended.” Twenty-nine percent expected that there would be “little or no change in the Vietnam situation.” Nearly as many (26 percent) believed that “the Red Chinese will have entered the war in Vietnam on a full scale basis,” while nine percent believed that “the war in Vietnam will have developed into a world war involving most of the major nations of the world.”⁵⁵²

This same Gallup Poll did show that the President and the administration were making progress in convincing Americans of the need for U.S. ground troops in Vietnam. When asked in late June, “what would you like to see the U.S. do next about Vietnam,” 40 percent of Americans now wanted the United States to either “send in more troops” or wage “all-out war” in Vietnam, an increase of five percentage points from the beginning of the month. This increase again came at the expense of those Americans who wanted to “continue [the] present policy” in Vietnam, now down to only 13 percent, a little more than half as many Americans as had held the same

⁵⁵¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 713* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 June 1965), 8-9.

⁵⁵² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 713* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 June 1965), 8-9.

view at the beginning of June. Only 19 percent of Americans now wanted to “withdraw troops” from Vietnam (down one percentage point from early June).⁵⁵³ Moreover, when Americans were asked whether “American efforts in Vietnam [should] be limited to only air and sea strikes” or whether “troops should...be committed to combat on the ground,” 57 percent of Americans believed ground troops should be used.⁵⁵⁴ While this does not demonstrate that a majority of Americans yet supported a massive increase in the number of U.S. ground troops in Vietnam, a majority did support the use of some U.S. ground troops in the conflict.

The dominant historical narrative that the American public did not realize that the President was taking the country into a ground war in Vietnam is also directly contradicted by this same Gallup Poll from late June. When given a choice only between escalation, de-escalation, or complete withdrawal, 74 percent of Americans chose escalation. Moreover—and in direct contradiction to those who would later say the President hid the escalation from the American people—when asked which of these options President Johnson was pursuing, 91 percent of Americans correctly identified that President Johnson was escalating the conflict.⁵⁵⁵

In light of these poll results, it is not surprising that the administration continued to try to convince the American public that the United States needed to intervene militarily in Vietnam in order to contain Communist expansion. In a radio interview on ABC radio in early July 1965, Secretary of State Rusk reiterated his theme from earlier in the year that Vietnam was a test of U.S. resolve to honor its commitments worldwide. When asked by journalist John Scali if

⁵⁵³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 713* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 June 1965), 10-11.

⁵⁵⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 713* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 June 1965), 12.

⁵⁵⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 713* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 June 1965), 10-11.

Vietnam was a test of “the credibility of American pledges,” Rusk said that, if America lost in South Vietnam, its “42 allies...should find themselves questioning the validity of the assurances of the United States with respect to their security.” Thais and West Berliners, Rusk said, would believe that U.S. promises “did not amount to very much.” Rusk also repeated the domino theory, saying that “South Viet-Nam is important in itself,” and, if the United States was not successful in South Vietnam, “this begins to roll things up all over the world.” Rusk also introduced a new argument that would be used repeatedly throughout the remainder of the Johnson Presidency. Rusk claimed that the war in Vietnam was a holding action until China matured. “There has been a big argument between Moscow and Peiping,” Rusk said, and “Peiping must also begin to work its way back toward the idea of mutual coexistence,” the position of the Soviet Union.⁵⁵⁶ The United States had to hold out in Southeast Asia until China embraced peaceful coexistence as the Soviet Union had.

As the announcement of the decision to deploy large numbers of U.S. Army Soldiers to Vietnam to participate in direct combat approached, the *New York Times* took on one of the President Johnson’s primary justifications for military intervention in Vietnam based on military containment of Communism. Attacking the President’s “almost daily” assertions “that ‘three Presidents have made the pledge for this nation’ to defend South Vietnam against the

⁵⁵⁶ Dean Rusk, “Secretary Rusk’s Interview re Vietnam on ‘Issues and Answers,’ American Broadcasting Company Radio and Television on July 11, 1965, With ABC Correspondents William H. Lawrence and John Scali, Department of State Bulletin, August 2, 1965, p. 188,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-49-50, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Communists and that ‘our national honor is at stake, our word is at stake,’⁵⁵⁷ the *Times* reminded its readers of President Kennedy’s words on Vietnam from two years earlier:

In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it—the people of Vietnam against the Communists.⁵⁵⁸

This dissent aside, the press remained largely supportive of the administration’s use of the ideology of containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. For instance, NBC News planned a national broadcast for 7 September 1965 called “American White Paper” in which prominent academic, press, and administration figures would debate not just the merits of U.S. participation in the Vietnam War, but the shape of U.S. foreign policy. A flier from July 1965 announcing this television event made it clear that the network held many of the same assumptions as the administration about the conflict in Vietnam. In describing one of the segments of the proposed program, the flier described the present international politics as “‘the have-not nations’...[being] confronted externally by Moscow, Peking, and the West in a bid for their loyalty.” Moreover, the flier described this conflict as vital to “protecting the national interest of the U.S. and the national aspirations of the developing countries.” Moreover, this flier described an entire segment as being dedicated to “the Rise of Red China,”⁵⁵⁹ adding:

China has become a power to be reckoned with not only because of her internal achievements, but her external aspirations in Asia, Africa and Latin America—“The

⁵⁵⁷ E.W. KENWORTHY, “Johnson’s Policy in Vietnam-Four Positions in Congress,” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 July 1965, E3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁵⁵⁸ E.W. KENWORTHY, “Johnson’s Policy in Vietnam-Four Positions in Congress,” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 July 1965, E3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁵⁵⁹ NBC, “*American White Paper*”: *A Report on U.S. Foreign Policy (1945-1965)*, [flier for NBC News program to air on 7 September 1965], NBC News, [July 1965], in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

Third World.” In Korea, China and the U.S. confronted each other for the first time as super powers. In India, French Indo-China, in the Formosa Straits, in the explosion of her atomic bomb, in Vietnam. China has made clear her intentions.⁵⁶⁰

This flier also echoed the administration’s claims that the SEATO treaty was a “military [alliance]” designed to respond “to Red Chinese pressures” and that “United States involvement in Vietnam” was aimed at “Red China” and “China's challenge.” The flier proposed for this segment the question of which policy would allow the United States to slow “the advance of China in the third world” just as with “the policy of containment that slowed the advance of the U.S.S.R. in Europe.”⁵⁶¹

The American people had also deeply internalized the precepts of the Cold War consensus on the eve of the final Americanization of the Vietnam War. A National Opinion Research Center Poll from mid-June demonstrated that the American public strongly supported internationalism; when asked if “it will be best for the future of this country if we take an active part in world affairs,” 79 percent of Americans agreed. Likewise, 85 percent of Americans believed the United States “should continue to belong to the United Nations.” When asked, “During the last year or so, would you say that most other countries in the world have become more friendly to the United States, or less friendly,” 55 percent of respondents did believe that other countries had become “less friendly.” But, when those Americans were asked why other countries were less friendly, only 35 percent said that it was a result of negative behaviors by the United States, such as “meddling in their affairs, trying to dominate their countries, impos[ing]

⁵⁶⁰ NBC, “*American White Paper*”: *A Report on U.S. Foreign Policy (1945-1965)*, [flier for NBC News program to air on 7 September 1965], NBC News, [July 1965], in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

⁵⁶¹ NBC, “*American White Paper*”: *A Report on U.S. Foreign Policy (1945-1965)*, [flier for NBC News program to air on 7 September 1965], NBC News, [July 1965], in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR)..

our own ideas, [or] telling them what to do,” or because the United States was “too warlike [or] aggressive.” Rather, most of these Americans believed that the cause was related to over-generous foreign aid (28 percent), jealousy of American success (18 percent), or a result of “Communist propaganda” or “Communist infiltration” (18 percent). This poll also revealed that Americans continued to support the core tenet of the Cold War consensus, military intervention to contain Communism. Americans were asked, “Suppose there is a revolution in one of the countries of South America, and it looks as though a communist government will take over. Do you think the United States should or should not send in American troops to prevent this?” Nearly 73 percent of Americans responded that the United States “should send American troops.”⁵⁶²

Just before the announcement of the decision to deploy large numbers of U.S. Army soldiers to Vietnam to participate in direct combat, scholar and former U.S. ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith sent a private letter to President Johnson outlining a scheme to deescalate the conflict in Vietnam. In view of his vocal opposition to the war in Vietnam before and after this letter, it was clearly a last-ditch effort to deter the President from going to war in Vietnam. Galbraith’s memorandum, entitled “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” seemed calibrated to appeal to the President’s political practicality, and was written in a gritty tone that was a caricature of President Johnson’s plain-spoken public persona. Yet Galbraith’s arguments firmly opposed the President’s contention that Vietnam was part of the Cold War. Galbraith first posited five foundational assumptions he believed the President should embrace. First, “Vietnam is of no great intrinsic importance. Had it gone Communist after

⁵⁶² National Opinion Research Center, *NORC Amalgam Study # 857* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, June 1965), 14-17.

World War II we would be just as strong as now.” Second, “no question of high principle is involved. It is their rascals or ours.” Third, he conceded Johnson’s concern that “we must show that we can't be thrown out—that we don't give up under fire.” Next, Galbraith wrote, appealing to Johnson’s political concerns, “It is right to consider the politics of the problem. A great many people who make policy do not have to take the political heat.” But, finally, allaying the President’s political concerns, Galbraith wrote, “Political questions are partly what we make them. Despite all of their efforts the Republicans could not make mileage last autumn out of Cuba.”⁵⁶³

Given these assumptions, Galbraith suggested that the President take six concrete steps. First, he suggested, “Instruct officials and spokesmen to stop saying the future of mankind, the United States and human liberty is being decided in Vietnam. It isn't.” Next, he suggested, “Stop saying that we are going to reconquer the whole country... The easiest way to have a failure is to set one up for ourselves by promising to do what can't be done.” Galbraith next suggested that the United States concentrate on holding a few areas and wait for a political settlement. “Let us apply a policy of political patience in the area,” Galbraith wrote. “That is a technique you understand.” As a result, he wrote, “The Viet Cong will not attack these areas frontally. Casualties will be low.”⁵⁶⁴ Galbraith also called for an end to the bombing:

Stop or gradually suspend the bombing north and south. This has slight military value, alarms our people and other countries and, above all, keeps the place at the top of the news with maximum attention there and minimum attention where it belongs.

⁵⁶³ John Kenneth Galbraith, memorandum for President Johnson, “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” [July 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁶⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, memorandum for President Johnson, “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” [July 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

(I think it may harden resistance to negotiation also—but on this no one can be sure and I am confining myself here to facts.)⁵⁶⁵

This final parenthetical note was a direct contradiction of an argument Galbraith had made publicly in a letter to the editors of the *New York Times* only a few months earlier, a concession no doubt designed to appease the President and his advisors. Finally, Galbraith suggested, “Keep open the offer of negotiations...someday they will come.”⁵⁶⁶

Galbraith’s predicted results for this policy seemed intended to appeal to Johnson’s political sensibilities:

(1) Unless they attack head on, which we can rule out, we will prove our staying power. We won't be playing their game by sending our forces out into the jungle where ambush works.

(2) The whole place will go on the back burner. Public attention will come back to areas of sound achievement of the Administration where it belongs.

(3) The Republicans will bleat as Keating did about Cuba. That will hurt them more than us.

(4) It will take the Russians off the hook and enable us to make progress there.⁵⁶⁷

Lest these prospects not be enough to entice the President, Galbraith added a few more enticements. First, this course of action would not force the administration to make the

⁵⁶⁵ John Kenneth Galbraith, memorandum for President Johnson, “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” [July 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁶⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith, memorandum for President Johnson, “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” [July 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁶⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith, memorandum for President Johnson, “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” [July 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

significant move of “calling up [the] reserve.” Galbraith agreed that this move would have significant repercussions, by adding “to the publicity and wrong emphasis on Vietnam.” Second, this course of action would extricate the President from the momentum of his “own eager beavers who do not consider the mood of our own people come the next election, and whose political teat is not in the wringer.”⁵⁶⁸

At the same time the President received this letter from John Kenneth Galbraith, the White House also received new polling numbers, this time from an internal poll of the Communication Workers of America, showing that the majority of these Americans wanted the escalation to continue. In answer to the question, “How do you feel about developments in Vietnam?” only 9.2 percent of the union’s rank-and-file membership endorsed the “present policy.” By contrast, 47.3 percent believed the United States “should get tougher” (among male respondents the percentage was higher, 52.6 percent). The leadership of the union more strongly favored the present policy, with 20.3 percent supporting the President’s course and 44.2 percent wanting the United States to “get tougher” (again, male respondents more strongly favored a tougher stance in Vietnam with 48.8 percent). Support for further escalation was strongest, the poll noted, in the “East” which favored escalation by 51.1 percent.⁵⁶⁹

A few days before the Presidential address announcing the deployment of large numbers of U.S. troops to Vietnam, the *Times*’ writer E.W. Kenworthy recounted the views of those in

⁵⁶⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, memorandum for President Johnson, “How to Take Ninety Percent of the Political Heat out of Vietnam,” [July 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁶⁹ Communication Workers of America, “CWA OPINION POLL #22-65 and #23-65, CONFIDENTIAL REPORT TO CWA EXECUTIVE BOARD,” Communication Workers of America, Washington, DC, [July 1965], box 80 [2 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (August - December 1965) [2 of 2], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

Congress who opposed Johnson's escalation in Vietnam. His conclusion was that Members of Congress privately disputed the President's use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention. Senators Morse and Gruening, Kenworthy wrote, opposed escalation on the grounds that it is "taking the nation down a road that may lead to nuclear war." Senators Mike Mansfield, J.W. Fulbright, Robert F. Kennedy, Jacob K. Javits, and George Aiken, Kenworthy wrote, believed it was "dangerously unrealistic to believe that the bombing of North Vietnam would force the Communists to the conference tables." Kenworthy wrote that most of the Congress was equally skeptical of the United States' policy in Vietnam but would not speak out publicly. In fact, Kenworthy wrote, virtually the only Congressmen who supported the President's policy were "those Republicans who ardently supported Barry Goldwater last year, such as Senator John G. [Tower] of Texas." Most in Congress, Kenworthy added, objected to the growing war on four grounds: bombing had been ineffective, the South Vietnamese government was weak, the war would eventually grow until the United States was doing all of the fighting, and the war was "'a hopeless venture' which can not be finally won."⁵⁷⁰ Kenworthy also attacked a pillar of the administration's military containment arguments for intervention:

Many of these Senators question the "domino" theory first advanced by Secretary Dulles. They seriously doubt that South Vietnam is essential to American security.⁵⁷¹

Kenworthy also provided four reasons why Congress was not more vocal in opposition: they did not want to dissent while troops were in harm's way, they realized the President had inherited the Vietnam problem, they had no alternatives to offer, and "they fear the cry of

⁵⁷⁰ E.W. KENWORTHY, "Johnson's Policy in Vietnam-Four Positions in Congress," Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 July 1965, E3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁵⁷¹ E.W. KENWORTHY, "Johnson's Policy in Vietnam-Four Positions in Congress," Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 July 1965, E3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

‘appeasement of Communism’ will be raised against them.” Kenworthy concluded that many were reluctant to publicly dissent because “they have noted the attacks made in some sections of the press on Senators Morse and Gruening.”⁵⁷²

Some Members of Congress privately confronted the President over his use of containment to justify the growing U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The administration’s reaction to this last-ditch effort to avoid the final Americanization of the Vietnam War sheds light on the reason that justifications based on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had disappeared from administration rhetoric. The President seemed to believe that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had inoculated him against Congressional dissent over his escalation of U.S. involvement in the conflict. Thus, the administration did not treat the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an expression of Congressional support for actions taken in August 1964. Instead, they treated the Resolution as if it were a sort of “insurance policy” against Congressional dissent that remained in effect despite Congress’ present sentiments about the war. Since few in the Senate—in fact, only Senators Morse, Gruening, and Fulbright—were publicly opposing the escalation, there was no need to remind the public that the Senate had passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution expressing support for the U.S. military intervention in the conflict.

The day before the President would announce the dramatic escalation of the number of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam, the President discussed the potential deployment of 100,000 soldiers with Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and other Senate leaders. The President told this assembly that the escalation was a temporary move to hold the line on North Vietnamese aggression until January and to give Secretary Rusk and Arthur Goldberg, the

⁵⁷² E.W. KENWORTHY, “Johnson's Policy in Vietnam-Four Positions in Congress,” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 July 1965, E3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

incoming U.S. ambassador to the UN, diplomatic room to extricate the United States from the conflict.⁵⁷³

In turn, Mansfield discussed the contents of this meeting privately with Senate leaders and penned a note for the President detailing the sentiments of these leaders on the idea of again escalating the conflict. The letter—a hodgepodge of suggestions from expanding to deescalating to ending the conflict—exemplified the conflicts between hawks and doves in the Senate and their inability to forge a consensus on the way ahead in Vietnam. Mansfield polled Senators Russell, Fulbright, Sparkman, Aiken, and Cooper. These Senators, first, believed that the required number of soldiers would be closer to 150,000. These Senators also believed that the window for Russia to help in forging a peace settlement was rapidly closing and that “bridges to Eastern Europe” needed to be kept open to improve the chances of a peace settlement. Senators also suggested that the President explore direct contacts with China and France as a means to end the conflict. Senators also believed that public support for the war was tentative at best, primarily because, like the Senators, Americans believed that Vietnam was not “a ‘vital’ area of U.S. concern,” despite Ambassador Lodge’s assertions to the contrary in a hearing in late July.⁵⁷⁴ Perhaps most indicative of the hawk-dove divide, the Senators believed:

The President was ill-advised to begin the bombing of North Viet Nam in the first

⁵⁷³ Mike Mansfield, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson, “SUBJECT: Meeting on Viet Nam,” 27 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁷⁴ Mike Mansfield, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson, “SUBJECT: Meeting on Viet Nam,” 27 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

place and the error was then compounded by the limited character of the bombing.⁵⁷⁵

Senators were also concerned that, if the “Goldberg-Rusk effort” failed, a substantially larger commitment would be required. Senators believed that—like France during the Indochina War—the U.S. should not commit conscripts to the conflict. The Senators also suggested some combination of an “enclave-strategy, a cessation of aerial bombardment and the use of all possible contacts to get negotiations underway.” But the bottom line from the Senate was that America was too deeply involved in Vietnam and needed to find a way out.⁵⁷⁶ Mansfield concluded:

There was obviously not a unanimity among the Members present on all of the points listed. But there was a very substantial agreement on many of them. Moreover, there was full agreement that insofar as Viet Nam is concerned we are deeply enmeshed in a place where we ought not to, be; that the situation is rapidly going out of control; and that every effort should be made to extricate ourselves.⁵⁷⁷

If President Johnson believed that he had the endorsement of the Congress solely from the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, this letter should have been a stern warning that he did not.

More than any other piece of evidence, the actions the President took after receiving this letter indicate that the President saw the Tonkin Gulf Resolution not as a “sense of the Congress” in August 1964 but as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent that endured regardless

⁵⁷⁵ Mike Mansfield, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson, “SUBJECT: Meeting on Viet Nam,” 27 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁷⁶ Mike Mansfield, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson, “SUBJECT: Meeting on Viet Nam,” 27 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁷⁷ Mike Mansfield, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson, “SUBJECT: Meeting on Viet Nam,” 27 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

of the present sentiments of the Congress. Rather than going to Congress and trying to convince dissenting Senators to support the administration's policies, Secretary of Defense McNamara prepared a point-by-point refutation of the Congressmen's views for the President. McNamara refuted Mansfield's objections to the administration's abandonment of "peaceful co-existence" by claiming that the Soviets abandoned it first by supporting "wars of liberation." In response to Mansfield's very real concern that Americans were "backing the President on Vietnam primarily because he is President, not necessarily out of any understanding or sympathy with policies on Vietnam," McNamara suggested "setting up a Task Force to explain our policies to the American people." Likewise, to counter Mansfield's concerns about growing racial tensions, McNamara suggested "the racial leaders throughout the country should be talked with, to make sure that they understand the danger of mixing Civil Rights and South Vietnam." Instead of talking directly to the Senators about their concern that Vietnam was "by no means a vital area of US concern," Secretary McNamara recounted for the President all of the administration's justifications for US military intervention in Vietnam based on military containment of Communism. McNamara's response to Mansfield's caution that France did not permit "conscripts to be used in Indochina" was, flatly, "The French lost the war in Indochina."⁵⁷⁸

Mansfield's letter had been a last-ditch effort by the Senate to communicate to the President that he no longer enjoyed the endorsement of the Congress for his present course in Vietnam. Had the President believed that he required the continuing support of the Congress, his reaction to this letter would have been alarm and a massive effort to reenlist Congressional support. Instead, the President acted as if he no longer needed the support of Congress to

⁵⁷⁸ Robert S. McNamara, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson with responses to Senator Mike Mansfield's '18 points,' 28 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

escalate the conflict. The most likely conclusion is that he believed that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution he had received from the Congress would prevent them from disagreeing publicly with his policies in Vietnam, regardless of their sentiments on the war.

Thus, President Johnson's and Secretary McNamara's reaction to this letter was not to try to persuade the Congress to support the administration's policies in Vietnam but to remind themselves how right they were and how wrong these Members of Congress were. As if to underline this fact, the President sent McNamara's point-by-point refutation of the Senator's concerns back to Mansfield, along with a cover letter praising Secretary McNamara as "the best Secretary of Defense in the history of this country."⁵⁷⁹

Perhaps the most prescient criticism Senator Mansfield provided for the President was his observation that the American public was supporting him simply because he was the President, rather than because they agreed with his policies in Vietnam. This fact is confirmed by polling data from the eve of the President's announcement of a troop increase. The American public was clearly now paying attention to the war in Vietnam; the number of Americans who called Vietnam the "most important problem facing this country today" than any other issue was up 15 percentage points from its low in May.⁵⁸⁰ Sixty-seven percent of Americans now approved of the President's handling of the war. Confirming Senator Mansfield's fears that Americans were simply supporting the President because he was President, over half of those who supported Johnson's policies in Vietnam simply expressed unqualified faith that the President "knows best" or "knows more about" the situation in Vietnam. Most of the remainder explicitly endorsed the

⁵⁷⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, letter to Senator Mike Mansfield with attached responses to Senator Mansfield's '18 points,' 28 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁸⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 714* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 July 1965), 6-8.

President's justifications for intervention either based on the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia (17 percent) or maintaining the credibility of the United States' worldwide commitments (12 percent).⁵⁸¹

At the insistence of his staff, the President made a televised announcement of his decision to send large numbers of American soldiers to Vietnam at midday on 28 July 1965.⁵⁸² Johnson's address was primarily an announcement of the deployment of U.S. Army Soldiers to Vietnam. But the President also explained his justifications for the move. The President mentioned the principle of tit-for-tat reprisals as a justification for escalation. However, he did so only to reinforce his primary justification for escalation, the ideology of military containment of Communism.⁵⁸³ The President explained:

In recent months they [the North Vietnamese] have greatly increased their fighting forces and their attacks and the number of incidents. I have asked the Commanding General, General [William C.] Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs.⁵⁸⁴

It is true that, on this occasion, the President relied on tit-for-tat reprisals as a justification.

However, in reality, the administration had already abandoned tit-for-tat retaliation as a basis for escalation. In an internal memorandum for the President in June 1965, McNamara

⁵⁸¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 714* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 July 1965), 9-10.

⁵⁸² Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 383.

⁵⁸³ Lyndon B. Johnson, "We Will Stand In Viet-Nam," *Department of State Publication 7937, Far Eastern Series 137*, U.S. State Department, Office of Media Services, Bureau of Public Affairs (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1965), accessed 19 October 2012, http://www.history.navy.mil/library/special/stand_vietnam.htm.

⁵⁸⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, "We Will Stand In Viet-Nam," *Department of State Publication 7937, Far Eastern Series 137*, U.S. State Department, Office of Media Services, Bureau of Public Affairs (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1965), accessed 19 October 2012, http://www.history.navy.mil/library/special/stand_vietnam.htm.

acknowledged that the primary purpose for the bombing of North Vietnam had been “first, to give us a better bargaining counter across the table from the North Vietnamese and, second, to interdict the flow of men and supplies from the North to the South.” The purpose of “reprisal” had been abandoned ever since the “Pleiku bombing” (Operation Flaming Dart).⁵⁸⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that it would be nearly a year before the administration used the precedent of tit-for-tat reprisals to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam again.

The President explained that he was raising the final troop strength in Vietnam to 125,000 men and that he would more than double the draft, but that he would not call up the Reserves. The President would also ask Congress for more money to prosecute the war early in 1966. The President said, returning to his pre-election rhetoric after the Gulf of Tonkin airstrikes, this action was “carefully measured.” But, he added, this action was required to contain Communist expansion; it was necessary in order “to bring an end to aggression” by the Communist north.⁵⁸⁶

The President also took this news conference as an opportunity to reiterate other justifications based on the military containment of Communism that the administration had been using since early 1964. In a reference to the lessons of Munich, President Johnson said that three times in his lifetime, “in two world wars and in Korea, Americans have gone to far lands to fight for freedom.” They had done so, Johnson claimed, because “we have learned at a terrible and

⁵⁸⁵ Robert S. McNamara, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson with responses to Senator Mike Mansfield’s ‘18 points,’ 28 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁸⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “We Will Stand In Viet-Nam,” *Department of State Publication 7937, Far Eastern Series 137*, U.S. State Department, Office of Media Services, Bureau of Public Affairs (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1965), accessed 19 October 2012, http://www.history.navy.mil/library/special/stand_vietnam.htm.

brutal cost that retreat does not bring safety and weakness does not bring peace.” Johnson also tied the lessons of Munich to the domino theory. “Surrender in Viet-Nam,” Johnson claimed, would not bring peace.⁵⁸⁷ Instead, Johnson continued:

We learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueller conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.⁵⁸⁸

President Johnson, as had other administration officials, conceded that “some citizens of South Viet-Nam, at times with understandable grievances, have joined in the attack on their own government.” But Johnson said he would not “let this mask the central fact that this is really war,” that the insurgency was “guided by North Viet-Nam, and...spurred by Communist China.” These forces intended “to conquer the South, to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of Communism.”

Johnson also repeated the administration’s newer claim that Vietnam was a test of U.S. commitment to honor its promises. “If we are driven from the field in Viet-Nam,” Johnson said, “then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American protection.” The President tied this newer argument to the much older argument, from early 1964, that his policies were a

⁵⁸⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at White House news Conference on July 28, 1965, ‘We Will Stand in Viet-Nam,’ Department of State Bulletin, August 16, 1965, p. 262,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-50-51, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵⁸⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at White House news Conference on July 28, 1965, ‘We Will Stand in Viet-Nam,’ Department of State Bulletin, August 16, 1965, p. 262,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-50-51, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

continuation of those of his predecessors. “Three Presidents,” he said, “President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.” The President also embraced the argument that, if the United States left Vietnam, there would be a bloodbath of reprisal against those who had fought with the Americans. “We just cannot now dishonor our word,” Johnson told the American public, “or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.”⁵⁸⁹

The President also restated the claim that “we do not seek the destruction of any government, nor do we covet a foot of any territory,” this time adding that the United States insisted that “the people of South Vietnam shall have the right of choice, the right to shape their own destiny in free elections in the south...and they shall not have any government imposed upon them by force and terror.” Johnson concluded: “This was the purpose of the 1954 agreements which the Communists have now cruelly shattered.”⁵⁹⁰

President Johnson concluded by echoing a promise that he had made weeks earlier in San Francisco. Johnson pledged “America's willingness to begin unconditional discussions with any government at any place at any time.”⁵⁹¹ This promise would be recalled repeatedly over the

⁵⁸⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at White House news Conference on July 28, 1965, ‘We Will Stand in Viet-Nam,’ Department of State Bulletin, August 16, 1965, p. 262,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-50-51, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵⁹⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at White House news Conference on July 28, 1965, ‘We Will Stand in Viet-Nam,’” from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 87, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵⁹¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson at White House news Conference on July 28, 1965, ‘We Will Stand in Viet-Nam,’” from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of

following years by those who sought to impugn the President's credibility on the war; those critics would claim that the President was not, in fact, willing to negotiate. The President did not even mention the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in this announcement.

The national press reported the President's 28 July message matter-of-factly, without alarm.⁵⁹² This tone was also tinged with a sense of relief, since both the public and the press had expected a larger escalation.⁵⁹³ But these reports on the announcement also showed that the press embraced the administration's use of containment to justify this escalation. The *Lewiston Morning Tribune* from Lewiston, Idaho echoed many of the President's arguments in favor of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of Communism. The editors of the *Tribune* wrote that the President's speech "served...to demonstrate conclusively and dramatically that the U.S. means every word when it says it will accept nothing short of total military victory or the opportunity to negotiate" and "to prepare the American people for a prolonged conflict." Moreover, the *Tribune* echoed the administration's repeated claim that the Viet Cong was a puppet of North Vietnam and that the North Vietnamese were participating in the war in South Vietnam. The editors of the *Tribune* also echoed the administration's arguments based on the lessons of Munich, writing, "The President does not believe in the so-called domino theory, [but] he certainly believes the Munich theory and intends to demonstrate conclusively that this nation will not back down to buy a few more months of peace." The *Tribune* called the "question of whether the United States should have gone into Viet Nam in the first

the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume I—Negotiations, 1965-1966, 87, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁵⁹² Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 2; Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure*, 33.

⁵⁹³ Helsing, *Johnson's War/Johnson's Great Society*, 1.

place...almost a dead issue.” Rather, the editors agreed with the President that “the only responsible way out is through victory or negotiated settlement.”⁵⁹⁴

Columnist Joseph Alsop was relieved that the Johnson administration finally “[meant] business” about winning the war in Vietnam. Answering those critics who claimed “bombing the North is useless,” Alsop responded, “The North has not really been bombed as yet.” Alsop described the United States’ efforts before the 28 July 1965, primarily air strikes against North Vietnamese targets, as comparable to bombing “West Virginia’s bridges, railroads and roads.” Alsop wrote: “We should be indignant, humiliated...But in the end we would certainly not be alarmed.” Alsop added: “We might even begin to laugh in our sleeves...if a powerful enemy made all sorts of statements about his bloody boldness and iron resolution and then just went on bombing West Virginia.” Alsop was happy that the President had indicated in his 28 July announcement that he was finally committing sufficient U.S. force to convince the Communists that the United States would not back down.⁵⁹⁵

Just as before the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the administration—and its media, academic, and activist supporters—used the ideology of military containment of Communism as justification to “Americanize” the Vietnam War. Beyond these containment arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, the administration also occasionally relied on the precedents set by the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The reprisal airstrikes in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident established the precedent of retaliation against North Vietnam for the actions of the Viet Cong.

⁵⁹⁴ Lewiston Morning Tribune, “There’s No Change in Viet Nam Policy,” *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, Lewiston, ID, 29 July 1965, 4.

⁵⁹⁵ Joseph Alsop, “Matter of Fact, Question: Does LBJ Really Mean Business?” Washington, *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, Lewiston, ID, 29 July 1965, 4.

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the Constitutional powers of the President, and prior Congressional expressions of support for South Vietnamese independence such as the ratification of the SEATO treaty became the administration's legal justifications for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

However, by the time of the deployment of large numbers of U.S. Army soldiers to the Vietnam War, both tit-for-tat justifications and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had virtually disappeared from administration rhetoric justifying U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. There is clear documentary evidence that tit-for-tat justifications for escalation were abandoned because the administration made the decision to stop escalating the war on a tit-for-tat basis and instead introduce forces on a more deliberate basis to contain Communist expansion. While there is less direct evidence to explain the disappearance of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution from administration rhetoric, the most likely explanation—based on the lack of public Congressional opposition to the escalation and the President's interactions with Congressional leaders during this period—is that the President did not believe he needed the actual support of Congress, since he had the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which he believed inoculated him—like a sort of “insurance policy”—against Congressional dissent. However, during this period Congressional opposition to the administration's policy in Vietnam was muted. Evidence of this attitude would become much more apparent in 1967, as public Congressional dissent grew and the President and the administration began to invoke the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against the Congress.

A growing list of opponents of the U.S. military escalation—activists, academics, and media commentators chief among them—tried to change the President's policies in Vietnam by arguing against the suitability of the strategy of military containment of Communism to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Opponents also sometimes attacked the entire idea of military containment

of Communism, not just in Vietnam, but anywhere. These critiques represented a dramatic broadening of the public debate on U.S. foreign policy; previously, questioning the tenets of the Cold War consensus had been beyond the pale of mainstream political discourse.

Notably, few opponents of the escalation questioned the President's credibility on the escalation of the war. Virtually no one questioned the use of tit-for-tat retaliation as a justification for escalation. And attacks on the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident or the legality of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were very infrequent. Opponents making these rare arguments were vastly outnumbered by the large number of opponents making arguments against the application of the ideology of military containment of Communism to Southeast Asia.

All of these attacks on the administration's policies in Vietnam failed to persuade the American public to oppose the administration. In fact, the American public remained firmly behind the President throughout the Americanization of the Vietnam War, supporting bombing and embracing the administration's arguments for U.S. military intervention based on the containment of Communism. It is true that the administration never succeeded in building a public consensus behind the introduction of large numbers of U.S. ground troops in Vietnam, but as the administration introduced more and more ground troops to the conflict, the public continued to support the President and his policies in Vietnam.

The framework of public debate over the war in Vietnam established in late 1964 and the first half of 1965—between supporters using arguments based on the containment of Communism and opponents arguing against the ideology of containment of Communism or its applicability to the war in Vietnam—would remain the framework for debate until 1968. Public dissent in the Congress—especially in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—grew during the period between mid-1965 and 1968. And that Congressional criticism was firmly focused on

the administration's use of containment to justify the war in Vietnam. As Congressional dissent grew, the administration and its supporters began to re-emphasize the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and claim that it proved that the Congress had endorsed the escalation of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Beginning in late 1966, opponents of the administration's policies increasingly attacked Presidential credibility on Vietnam. Yet, despite this explosion of dissent, the American public remained largely behind the President and his policies in Vietnam throughout this period, as well.

Chapter 3 - Political Stalemate

The framework of public debate over the war in Vietnam established in the first half of 1965—between supporters using arguments based on the containment of Communism and opponents arguing against the ideology of containment of Communism or its applicability to the war in Vietnam—would remain the framework for debate until mid-1967.

Public dissent in the Congress—especially in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—grew during this period. However, Congressional opposition to the President's policies in Vietnam, like dissent from activists and opponents in the media, focused on the suitability of military containment to the Vietnam War. Dissent also grew dramatically amongst radical activists during this period, resulting most visibly in massive demonstrations in October and November 1965 and April 1967. Radical activists opposed not just the application of the ideology of containment to Vietnam but the ideology of containment itself—and its impact on domestic and foreign policy.

While many of the administration's critics on Vietnam simply wanted to end the war, there was a small core of dissenters within this larger antiwar movement who wanted to move the United States beyond a foreign policy based on the ideology of military containment of Communism. Within the Congress and academia, dissenters decried military containment as outmoded and argued that it had eroded the role of the Senate in advice and consent on foreign policy. Radical protesters decried the distorting effect that the ideology of containment on America's domestic and foreign policy. Together, these more fundamental critiques of U.S. foreign policy from Congress, academia, and the New Left constituted a foreign policy revolution bent on moving the United States beyond containment to a new foreign policy framework.

Beginning in late 1965, a new line of attack against the administration's policies in Vietnam began to take shape. Some opponents began to question the credibility of the President and his administration on the Vietnam War. These attacks did not gain momentum until late 1966, when opponents first attacked the administration's credibility on civilian casualties. This was followed by an equally effective attack on the President's credibility on his willingness to negotiate.

Despite this growing dissent, the American public continued to support the war in Vietnam and seemed to have accepted the President's justifications for military intervention in Vietnam based on the ideology of military containment. In fact, when Americans did disapprove of the President's policies in Vietnam, it was frequently because they were not considered to be aggressive enough.

As dissent in Congress grew, the administration occasionally reminded Congress of its insurance policy against their dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. However, otherwise the administration's stubborn response to growing dissent was to insist that the containment of Communism justified U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The administration never explained to the majority of Americans who wanted a more aggressive approach to the war why it thought it could not adopt this policy. Likewise, the administration never developed an effective strategy for dealing with attacks on its credibility. Instead, the administration doggedly continued to justify the war using the ideology of military containment. As a result, while most Americans continued to support the war and the administration's justifications based on the containment of Communism, in 1966 and 1967, many Americans increasingly disapproved of the President's handling of the war and increasingly doubted his credibility.

In the weeks after the announcement of a dramatic increase in the number of U.S. ground troops in Vietnam, most Americans were intensely concerned about the growing war in Vietnam but continued to support the President. A White House poll of Pennsylvania voters found that a plurality of Pennsylvanians (40 percent) saw the Vietnam War as the most important issue facing the nation. And 53 percent of Pennsylvanians approved of the President's handling of the situation. Moreover, the pollsters commented that many of those who did not approve of the President's policies in Vietnam wanted even greater escalation of the conflict.⁵⁹⁶ A Gallup poll of all Americans found almost identical concern over the issue of Vietnam nationally.⁵⁹⁷

After the announcement of troop deployments to Vietnam on 28 July 1965, the administration immediately returned to the containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention. In August 1965, the White House released a pamphlet (and similarly-titled film) called "Why Vietnam?" This was a collection of statements and letters from Presidents and administration officials since the Eisenhower administration. It was also a catalogue of the arguments based on the ideology of military containment that the Johnson administration had been using to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam since early 1964. First and foremost, the pamphlet supported the argument that the Johnson administration was continuing the policy of preceding administrations over the previous eleven years. The pamphlet provided "historic documents" proving that "two American Presidents [had] define[d] and affirm[ed] the commitment of the United States to the people of South Vietnam." The pamphlet included letters

⁵⁹⁶ Oliver Quayle and Company, "A SURVEY OF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN PENNSYLVANIA, Study #285," Oliver Quayle and Company, Bronxville, NY, August 1965, box 80 [2 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (August - December 1965) [2 of 2], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁵⁹⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 715* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 5-10 August 1965), 5-7

from Eisenhower to Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Diem and from Kennedy to President Diem that “describe[d] the issues at stake and pledge[d] United States assistance in South Vietnam's resistance to subversion and aggression.” In at least one letter, Eisenhower also warned of the lessons of Munich, telling Churchill: “We failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time....May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson?” In another letter, to Diem, Eisenhower restated the Johnson administration’s claim that the war was a result of Communist aggression. He wrote that he wished to help South Vietnam build a state that could “discourage any who might wish to impose foreign ideology on your free people.”⁵⁹⁸

The pamphlet also quoted members of the Johnson administration using containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Secretary of State Dean Rusk was quoted from a statement on 3 August 1965, citing specific numbers of men and types of equipment that had crossed the border from North to South Vietnam since 1959. In this statement, Rusk also claimed that the war was guided by “Communist North Vietnam, with the backing of Peiping and Moscow.” Rusk also repeated the administration’s promise that it did not “seek to destroy or overturn the Communist regimes in Hanoi and Peiping,” but rather to force North Vietnam to “cease their aggressions.” Likewise, Rusk claimed that the Johnson administration wanted “no permanent bases and no special position” in Southeast Asia. In this statement Rusk also argued that Southeast Asia must be defended until Communist China matured and, like the Soviet Union, embraced peaceful coexistence. Rusk also placed the war in Vietnam in the context of

⁵⁹⁸ White House, “Why Vietnam?” Pamphlet distributed to the Washington Press Corps, White House, Washington, DC, 20 August 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record—Senate*, US Congress, Washington, DC, 25 August 1965, 20857, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

other Cold War flashpoints, listing such confrontations against “aggressive appetites” as Iran, Turkey, Greece, West Berlin, Korea, Cuba, and the Congo. In restating the precepts of the domino theory, Rusk said that the loss of Southeast Asia “could drastically alter the strategic situation in Asia and the Pacific to the grave detriment of our own security and that of our Allies.” This pamphlet cited Rusk as noting the recent deployment of a division from South Korea to Vietnam as evidence that other Asian countries believed the domino theory as well. Rusk also claimed that “the Chinese Communists have chosen to make South Vietnam the test case for their...so-called ‘wars of national liberation,’” a technique Rusk claimed had also been embraced by Khrushchev. Rusk also claimed that the Vietnam War was a contest between the Soviet Union and Communist China for “prestige” within the Communist World and among “the non-aligned nations.”⁵⁹⁹

Rusk also cited Congress’s commitments to South Vietnam. Rusk noted that the Senate had ratified the SEATO treaty and numerous aid packages for South Vietnam which, Rusk claimed, committed the United States to act militarily in Vietnam. Rusk also cited the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a commitment to South Vietnam. First, he stated the administration’s version of the events of 4 August 1964—the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁶⁰⁰ Rusk then added:

Congress, by a combined vote of 504 to 2, passed a resolution expressing its support for actions by the Executive “including the use of armed force” to meet aggression in

⁵⁹⁹ White House, “Why Vietnam?” Pamphlet distributed to the Washington Press Corps, White House, Washington, DC, 20 August 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record—Senate*, US Congress, Washington, DC, 25 August 1965, 20857, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁰⁰ White House, “Why Vietnam?” Pamphlet distributed to the Washington Press Corps, White House, Washington, DC, 20 August 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record—Senate*, US Congress, Washington, DC, 25 August 1965, 20857, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Southeast Asia, including specifically aggression against South Vietnam. The resolution and the Congressional debate specifically envisaged that...the armed forces of the United States might be committed in the defense of South Vietnam in any way that seemed necessary, including employment in combat.⁶⁰¹

Rusk was claiming that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was an explicit endorsement of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.⁶⁰² This passage omitted the important fact that the President had assured Senators that he would not use the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to prosecute a war in Vietnam. This statement was also significant in that it was the last time the administration would mention the Tonkin Gulf Resolution for nearly a year.

Congressional dissent in mid-1965 was still relatively rare. In late August 1965, Senator Ernest Gruening did threaten to attach an amendment to the defense appropriations bill that would have prohibited the Defense Department from sending draftees to Vietnam against their will. The core of Gruening's dissent was that the President had "sought no declaration of war from the only part of the Federal Government authorized by the constitution to declare war—the Congress." Gruening told his colleagues: "A vote against the amendment or a vote to table this amendment [would] be a vote to use the peacetime conscription laws to send draftees to fight and perchance to die" in Vietnam.⁶⁰³ This attack on the President's policies in Vietnam was

⁶⁰¹ White House, "Why Vietnam?" Pamphlet distributed to the Washington Press Corps, White House, Washington, DC, 20 August 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record—Senate*, US Congress, Washington, DC, 25 August 1965, 20857, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁰² White House, "Why Vietnam?" Pamphlet distributed to the Washington Press Corps, White House, Washington, DC, 20 August 1965, reprinted in *Congressional Record—Senate*, US Congress, Washington, DC, 25 August 1965, 20857, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁰³ Ernest Gruening, draft floor speech, "DRAFTEES SHOULD NOT BE SENT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA INVOLUNTARILY WITHOUT CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL," [August 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-

significant in that it was the only attack mounted by anyone in the Senate against the validity of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution before the Tet Offensive.

Gruening only abandoned this effort after a personal call from the President in which Johnson promised that no draftees inducted before the end of the year would go to Vietnam before January 1966. In the letter certifying this agreement and thanking Gruening for relenting, the President avoided arguing the validity of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, instead justifying U.S. military intervention using the ideology of containment of Communism. He wrote that North Vietnam could not “evade its responsibility for aggression against South Vietnam.” The bombing of North Vietnam was “a response in the North to Hanoi’s expanded aggression in the South” intended to “persuade the aggressors to desist.”⁶⁰⁴

While Gruening was mounting his unsuccessful attack on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, most war opponents focused their attacks on the administration’s arguments for military intervention based on the containment of Communism. Edward J. Meeman, editor of the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, objected that the United States, with its intervention in South Vietnam, was opening itself to charges of “colonial[ism]” or, worse, setting the stage for “World War III with nuclear destruction.” Meeman believed it was “not the time for a final confrontation with world Communism,” since the Communist world was in the midst of a movement toward fragmentation and moderation. Meeman was prepared to give the President the benefit of the doubt, writing, “No man desires peace in Vietnam more than President Johnson.” But, Meeman objected, the President was trying to achieve this peace by escalating “in order that our side will

CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [2 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 39-41.

⁶⁰⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, letter to Senator Ernest Gruening about his proposed amendment to prevent draftees from being involuntarily sent to Vietnam, [after 20 August 1965], box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [2 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

obtain a better military position.” Meeman advocated immediate withdrawal, while he did concede that the United States must offer asylum “to the leaders and ringleaders of the Vietnamese patriots who would be liquidated by the Communists if they stayed.” This editorial also attacked the very core of the ideology of military containment. “The relative strength of Communism and Freedom is not determined by the number of square miles occupied by Communists and governments labeled free,” Meeman concluded. “Freedom’s strength is in the unity of the peoples and the success of the free governments.”⁶⁰⁵

Attacks on the President’s credibility in 1965 were also rare. One government official did attack Presidential credibility as early as August 1965. Republican Governor of Rhode Island John Chafee (who would later serve as Secretary of the Navy and U.S. Senator) attacked the President’s credibility on two points. First, Chafee argued that the President was disingenuous in telling the American people they could fight the Vietnam War without paying for it. “Never mind,” Chafee quipped, “we’ll put it off on future generations.” Chafee also criticized the administration’s claims of success in its bombing program. He called estimates of enemy losses to bombing “the closest thing to fiction writing we’ve seen in a long time.”⁶⁰⁶ Neither of these attacks was repeated by other critics of the administration and this attack on the administration’s credibility quickly faded from the headlines.

⁶⁰⁵ Edward J. Meeman, “‘National Honor’ Is Romantic View: We Face Hopeless Cause in Vietnam, and Should Quit While There’s Time,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 2 August 1965, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁰⁶ Evening Bulletin, “Contradiction Seen: GUNS, BUTTER BOTHER CHAFEE,” *Evening Bulletin*, Philadelphia, PA, 11 August 1965, 34, found in box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [2 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 39-41.

Instead, dissent against the administration's policies in Vietnam remained focused on opposition to the administration's justifications based on the containment of Communism. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) published a pamphlet, the *Vietnam Study Guide*, that was designed to assist activists in arguing against the Vietnam War. Among the suggestions was advice on how to show "how little proof the other side has been able to come up with" to prove North Vietnamese assistance to the Viet Cong. The pamphlet also provided instructions on how to disprove "the 'menace' of Communist Chinese expansionism which many people believe to be lurking behind the Communist thrust in Vietnam." This pamphlet claimed that, by intervening in Vietnam, the United States had in fact "reverse[d] a successful revolution in the South... by installing an anti-communist regime." The core of the SDS's antiwar argument was that a Communist takeover of Vietnam was the inevitable result of anti-colonial nationalism. The pamphlet concluded: "Do not try to paint communism as a picnic for the peasant masses; insist only that it is a better alternative than any which the United States is prepared to sponsor."⁶⁰⁷

In early August 1965, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara appeared in an interview on CBS News and again used the ideology of containment to defend the growing war in Vietnam. Journalist Harry Reasoner asked the Secretaries how American "honor" and "security" were involved in the conflict in Vietnam. Rusk responded by arguing that the conflict was a result of Communist aggression and that the United States had to honor its commitments. McNamara repeated his argument that the Vietnam War was "the model of the national liberation movement" and warned that it would be seen in Latin America and across Asia if it succeeded in Vietnam. Rusk insisted that the conflict was "about the life and death of the Nation." Rusk

⁶⁰⁷ Steven J. Rosenthal, *Vietnam Study Guide and Annotated Bibliography* (San Francisco, CA: Students for a Democratic Society, 1965), 2, 3.

explained that “the essential fact” of the conflict was “that North Viet-Nam has sent tens of thousands of men and large quantities of arms into South Viet-Nam to take over that country by force.” Rusk added that the United States was committed to stop this aggression in accordance with “the Southeast Asia Treaty,” “the bilateral arrangements that President Eisenhower made with the Government of South Viet-Nam,” and “the most formal declarations of three Presidents of both political parties.”⁶⁰⁸

In this same interview, Rusk claimed that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution itself committed United States to act to defend South Vietnam. Rusk explained that the United States was committed to the defense of South Vietnam by “regular authorizations and appropriations of the Congress in giving aid to South Viet-Nam.” But he added that the United States was also bound by “the resolution of the Congress of last August.”⁶⁰⁹ The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was, in this conception, not just an insurance policy against Congressional dissent, but a binding commitment to defend South Vietnam that could not be broken—a concept found nowhere in the text of the resolution.

⁶⁰⁸ Robert S. McNamara and Dean Rusk, “Interview with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara on a Columbia Broadcasting System television program by Peter Kalischer, Alexander Kendrick, and Harry Reasoner, on August 9, 1965, ‘Political and Military Aspects of U.S. Policy in Viet-Nam,’ Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, p. 342,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-53-58, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁶⁰⁹ Robert S. McNamara and Dean Rusk, “Interview with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara on a Columbia Broadcasting System television program by Peter Kalischer, Alexander Kendrick, and Harry Reasoner, on August 9, 1965, ‘Political and Military Aspects of U.S. Policy in Viet-Nam,’ Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, p. 342,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-53-58, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

In this CBS interview, in the very nature of the questions they posed, Kalischer, Kendrick, and Reasoner attacked the administration's justifications for the war based on the ideology of the containment of Communism. For instance, in obvious reference to Morley Safer's television news story about Marines burning the village of Cam Ne that had aired on 5 August only 4 days earlier,⁶¹⁰ Kendrick asked in a follow up to a question about national honor: "What about dishonor? What about the world image that we now present? We are burning villages, we are killing civilians." Attacking the contention that the United States was assisting the people of South Vietnam in preserving their freedom, Kalischer asked: "Are we reasonably assured that this government represents the people of South Viet-Nam or even a large number of the people in South Viet-Nam?" Evoking the specter of the Korean War, Kendrick asked if the United States was "still fighting the same war with Communist China that we were fighting in Korea." Reasoner questioned the application of the lessons of Munich to the Vietnam War; he said that Americans "have trouble understanding just what we mean when we speak in the pattern of having to defend it here or we will have to fight in some less suitable place." When Secretary Rusk claimed that the United States had to prove the value of its commitments to other countries outside of Vietnam, Kendrick immediately rebutted, "Is it possible that it is an [over-commitment]?"⁶¹¹

⁶¹⁰ Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 58; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 152; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 385.

⁶¹¹ Robert S. McNamara and Dean Rusk, "Interview with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara on a Columbia Broadcasting System television program by Peter Kalischer, Alexander Kendrick, and Harry Reasoner, on August 9, 1965, 'Political and Military Aspects of U.S. Policy in Viet-Nam,' Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, p. 342," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-53-58, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

There was still very little Congressional dissent on Vietnam in the late summer 1965. In fact, some members of Congress still publicly supported the President and his justifications for U.S. military intervention based on the containment of Communism. In an Associated Press interview in late September 1965, Senator Edward Kennedy, who would later become a vocal opponent of the war, supported the domino theory. When asked if he subscribed “to the so-called ‘domino effect’ theory about South Viet Nam,”⁶¹² Kennedy answered:

I do not think the effect would be so quick or immediate, but I do believe that if we abandon our commitment in South Viet Nam it would lessen the ability of nations like Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines to stand up to the pressures of Communist China.⁶¹³

While many media figures supported the administration’s justifications for U.S. military intervention based on the containment of Communism, many also wanted the administration to be more aggressive in fighting the war. Columnist Alice Widener wrote in October 1965 that the only way to stop Communist expansion in Southeast Asia was to defeat North Vietnam militarily. In fact, Widener believed that even more force was required. Widener criticized the President’s “willingness to negotiate for a peaceful settlement of the issues in the war.” She added: “The only message the Reds will ‘get’ is a knock-out blow that would blast Ho Chi Minh and his clique out of power in North Vietnam.” Still, supporting the administration’s justifications based on the containment of Communism, Widener put the blame for the conflict squarely on Hanoi. “The openly avowed purpose of the Hanoi regime,” she wrote, “is to overthrow the Saigon government and communize South Vietnam.” Widener wrote that, if

⁶¹² Associated Press, “JFK Gave Country Impetus, Brother Ted Says,” Washington, DC, *Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, FL, 27 September 1965, 16-A

⁶¹³ Associated Press, “JFK Gave Country Impetus, Brother Ted Says,” Washington, DC, *Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, FL, 27 September 1965, 16-A

America's avowed purpose were the "overthrow of the Hanoi regime and liberation of the North Vietnamese from communism" and the means were the destruction of "Ho's industrial plants, electric power, and port facilities," America's message to the Communists world would be perfectly clear. To those who argued that such an escalation would draw Communist China and the Soviet Union into the war, her answer was that "the likelihood of such risk-taking appears to be nil because it... would be suicidal" for the Communists. Widener concluded: "The American people don't want and will not tolerate another Korea. They have had enough of war-without-victory."⁶¹⁴

The White House had evidence in late summer 1965 that much of the American public was similarly dissatisfied with the administration's policies in Vietnam because they were not aggressive enough. Internal White House polling of voters in New Haven, Connecticut showed that the President's favorable ratings on handling the conflict had slipped from 53 percent to 48 percent favorable between July and September. Moreover, 55 percent of New Haven voters wanted the President to "step up our military even more and win the war." It wasn't clear from this poll how these voters wanted the war "step[ed] up"; only 13 percent wanted to "bomb Red China" and only 24 percent wanted to "bomb Hanoi."⁶¹⁵

A Gallup poll from late August and early September provided a clearer prescription. Most Americans were unequivocal in their support of the President's decision to defend the

⁶¹⁴ Alice Widener, "Why Ho Misses Message," New York, newspaper editorial, [October 1965], Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶¹⁵ Oliver Quayle and Company, "A SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, Wave IV, Study #288," Oliver Quayle and Company, Bronxville, NY, September 1965, box 80 [2 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (August - December 1965) [2 of 2], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

sovereignty of South Vietnam; when asked, “in view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam,” 71 percent of Americans who responded answered with an unqualified “no.” Americans were nearly evenly split over the effectiveness of the U.S. efforts there. Slightly more of those Americans who had an opinion believed that the United States was doing “very well” in Vietnam, while fewer believed that the United States was “not doing so well” in that conflict. However, of those who believed the United States was “not doing so well,” 19 percent believed that the United States needed “to go all the way” and wage “all out war.” Another 10 percent believed the United States had placed “too many limitations” on the fighting forces already present in Vietnam for them to be successful. Six percent suggested that the United States needed “more troops [and] equipment” in Vietnam.⁶¹⁶ The administration was not doing anything to explain to these Americans why it was not being more aggressive in Vietnam.

The March on Washington

Fall 1965 brought a series of dramatic protests. Two separate protestors, emulating Buddhist monks who had committed suicide by self-immolation years earlier in Vietnam, killed themselves by self-immolation—one in front of the Pentagon and one in front of the United Nations. On 16 October 1965 there was a round of antiwar demonstrations in 40 American cities and several capitals in Europe. In November, protesters mounted a 20,000-man march on Washington.⁶¹⁷

Radical protesters objected not just to the application of containment to U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, but to the ideology of containment itself. During this same period,

⁶¹⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 716* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 27 August-1 September 1965), 8-11.

⁶¹⁷ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 394; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 495.

Senator J. William Fulbright's dissent against the war in Vietnam was joined by other members of Congress objecting to the administration's use of containment to justify the war. Most in the media and the American public rejected both radical protesters and this more modest Congressional dissent. The media even began to attack opponents of the war as aiding Communists. In fact, the excesses of these radical protesters actually increased support for the President's handling of the war in Vietnam.

While radical protesters seemed to pose little threat to the President's policies in Vietnam, privately, the administration was coming to the realization that it had two bigger problems with which to contend—many Americans objected to the President's policies in Vietnam either because they were not aggressive enough or because they were beginning to doubt the administration's credibility. However, rather than address these problems, the administration stubbornly continued to use the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify the war.

Along with perennial dissenter Dr. Benjamin Spock, the November protest also featured the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam, whose president proudly announced he had received a letter from Nguyen Huu Tho, chairman of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front, wishing him luck in advance of the march. Another group participating in the march, the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of Vietnam, used the protest as an opportunity to raise money to buy medical supplies for the Viet Cong, fly the National Liberation Front flag, and distribute North Vietnamese propaganda pamphlets.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁸ Paul L. Montgomery, "DIVERSE GROUPS JOIN IN PROTEST: Participants Range From Pacifists to Far Leftists," *New York Times*, 28 November 1965, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 86.

The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), key organizers of the November march on Washington, sought more than an end to the war in Vietnam. The core of their dissent was an objection to the Cold War order, both in foreign and domestic policy. The SDS openly offered its conception of post-World War II history:

Seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the two blocs created a world in which virtually every human value was distorted, all moral standards seemed weirdly irrelevant, all hopes and aspirations appeared Utopian. For the Cold War resulted in an arms race in which enormous resources and human energy were squandered and preparation for the murder of innocent millions became basic policy, while the elemental needs of these millions remained unsatisfied. It produced societies in which the requirements of huge military, industrial and political bureaucracies took precedence over all other social or individual priorities. It poisoned and corroded all aspects of intellectual activity. To it were sacrificed the essential ingredients of democratic process—free debate, the right to dissent, political engagement and controversy. And its final outcome was a balance of terror so precarious and so infinitely dangerous that, in the end, all interests and all security were in jeopardy.⁶¹⁹

In this conception, the Vietnam War was caused not by “communist aggression, but by the basic inability of the U.S. government to offer political and economic alternatives to people in revolutionary upsurge.” Unless stopped, the administration’s “resolve to meet revolution with force” would mean “the sure devastation of country after country in the Third World.”⁶²⁰

Just before this wave of radical protests, Senator J. William Fulbright mounted his own, less radical protest against the ideology of military containment in a speech in Pittsburgh. Fulbright decried what he called a “drift toward the role of global policeman.” He added that there was something “fishy, something unhealthy about a nation which tries to tell the rest of the

⁶¹⁹ Students for a Democratic Society, “America and New Era,” October 1965, in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 159.

⁶²⁰ Students for a Democratic Society, “America and New Era,” October 1965, in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 164.

world how to run its business, when our own home-front is in such an untidy mess.”⁶²¹ This speech made no more impact on the American public than the radical activists’ protests.

The press was unsympathetic toward the protesters. An October 1965 political cartoon from the *Philadelphia Enquirer* captured the view of most in the media (and in the American public) toward the protesters. This cartoon showed two young protesters, one carrying a sign that read, “Burn your draft card.” The other, with longer hair and a beard, carried a partially obscured placard that appeared to say “Get out of Vietnam.” The two men also carried a bucket of glue and a ladder, and appeared to be leaving the place where they had just glued a poster to a brick wall. The poster contained a caricature of Mao Zedong pointing a finger as Uncle Sam did in older, World War II recruiting posters. The caption on the poster read, “I need you.” The caption on the cartoon read, “Recruitment,” implying that the protesters were encouraging others to aid Communist China by opposing the war.⁶²²

As the season of protests continued, there were other indications that the vast majority of Americans rejected the arguments and tactics of these radical protesters. In a Gallup poll from early November, Americans were asked, “To what extent, if any, have the Communists been involved in the demonstrations over Viet Nam.” Nearly 65 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion responded that the Communists had “a lot” of involvement in the demonstrations, with another 23 percent believing that Communists had “some” involvement in the protests.⁶²³

⁶²¹ Paul Harvey “Fulbright Changing His Views,” [July 1966]. Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶²² [Unknown], “Recruitment,” political cartoon, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 October 1965, 10, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶²³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 719* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 29 October-2 November 1965), 16-17.

As the fall 1965 protests wore on, there were also indications that antiwar activism may have increased American public support for the President's policies in Vietnam. An internal White House poll of likely voters in Rockland County, New York showed that 59 percent of voters gave Johnson a favorable rating on his handling of Vietnam. Pollsters added in their comments that this was "close to his national rating." Most promising for the President, of those Rockland County voters who expressed an opinion, 50 percent believed that the President should "do as we are. Keep on fighting, but seek negotiations." This was followed by the 38 percent of voters who believed, "He should go even further, and either win or force negotiations." Only 8 percent of Rockland County voters believed the United States should withdraw from Vietnam. Pollsters concluded that the President "has succeeded in making this policy acceptable...and he has achieved popular support for our actions in Viet Nam in the face of continued noisy opposition." But pollsters did warn that, as the war dragged on, voters might begin to demand more escalation of the conflict.⁶²⁴

These results were mirrored nationally in a Gallup Poll after the October protests across 40 American cities. Fully three quarters of Americans who expressed an opinion believed it was the right decision to intervene militarily in the conflict in Vietnam. Moreover, the prognosis for the war in Vietnam had improved markedly. Forty percent of Americans who expressed an opinion believed the United States would "win" the Vietnam War, though slightly more Americans believed the war would end in "another Korea" or a less-than-optimal compromise

⁶²⁴ Oliver Quayle and Company, "A SURVEY OF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN ROCKLAND COUNTY, N.Y., Study #293," Oliver Quayle and Company, Bronxville, NY, November 1965, box 80 [2 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (August - December 1965) [1 of 2], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

peace. More conclusively, however, 69 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion now believed that the United States was doing “very well” in Vietnam.⁶²⁵

Interestingly, opinions also hardened in favor of politicians who advocated a stronger response in Vietnam after the October protests. In early September 1965, a slight majority (53 percent) of Americans who had an opinion on the question would be “less inclined” to vote for “a candidate for Congress in your district [who] advocated sending a great many more men to Vietnam.”⁶²⁶ By early November, opinion had shifted dramatically on this question; nearly 60 percent of those expressing an opinion would be “more likely” to support such a candidate.⁶²⁷

During this season of antiwar protests, there was also increased Congressional dissent—and that dissent was focused on the administration’s use of containment to justify the war. In November 1965, a delegation of Congressmen led by Senator Mike Mansfield travelled to South Vietnam on a fact-finding mission.⁶²⁸ Democratic Senator Stephen M. Young of Ohio returned from this trip and began public opposition to the war. Young attacked the administration’s argument that containment of Communism required military intervention in Vietnam. Young said he was convinced that “South Viet Nam is of no strategic importance to the defense of the United States,” that the bulk of Viet Cong guerillas were South Vietnamese, and that the United States had inadvertently intervened in a civil war. He also told reporters that, while the domino

⁶²⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 719* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 29 October-2 November 1965), 5-7, 8-9.

⁶²⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 716* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 27 August-1 September 1965), 8-11.

⁶²⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 719* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 29 October-2 November 1965), 8-9.

⁶²⁸ Jack Valenti, memorandum for President Johnson containing Senator Mike Mansfield’s statement before traveling to Vietnam, 10 November 1965, box 12, folder CO 312 VIETNAM (1964-1965), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

theory may have been valid in the “Stalin era,” it was no longer valid with “Moscow and Peking in bitter conflict.” His prescription was a bombing halt. He implored the President to resist the “militarists” in the Pentagon who wanted an escalation of the bombing to include Haiphong and Hanoi. He also believed that the United States should include the Viet Cong and Hanoi in peace negotiations.⁶²⁹

In December 1965, Pennsylvania Democratic Senator Joseph S. Clark joined the Congressional dissenters in attacking the administration’s use of military containment to justify the war. In a speech, Clark opposed further escalation of the war on the grounds that there was “very little hope of a military solution.” He added: “For every acre of ground you take, you sent a coffin back.” Clark proposed holing up in coastal enclaves to “make it clear we will never be driven out.” Clark also echoed Senator Ernest Gruening’s earlier objection to the administration’s legal basis for the war, saying that it was “completely illegal and unconstitutional.” However, now that the United States was in the war, Clark concluded, it could not cut and run.⁶³⁰

Many in the media rejected this Congressional dissent by using the administration’s arguments justifying military intervention as a means to contain Communism. The *Pine Bluff Commercial* from Senator J. William Fulbright’s home state of Arkansas compared the aggression against South Vietnam to Hitler’s aggression against Czechoslovakia and those who opposed intervention in South Vietnam to those—like Neville Chamberlain—who, the *Commercial* claimed, had failed to stand up to Hitler’s aggression and, thus, created the calamity

⁶²⁹ George Jenks, “Young Advises Pause in Raids On Vietnamese,” Washington, DC, *Toledo Blade*, Toledo, OH, 25 November 1965, 2.

⁶³⁰ William B. Collins, “Vietnam War Isn’t Worth the Cost of Lives, Clark Says,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 December 1965, 2, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1965, Box 7, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

of the Second World War. The *Commercial* mocked those Congressmen who wanted to abandon Vietnam: “People will think.... Put it off, wait till they get to Thailand, make our stand across the Mekong or in Malaya, or make Australia an invulnerable fortress continent.” The editors wrote that Chamberlain may have wanted noble goals, but in the end “Neville Chamberlain went to Munich. And the war he had bargained away Czechoslovakia to prevent came even before he left office.” The editorial warned those who wanted to leave Vietnam against believing “that peace can be purchased at the price of a small country, that this is the aggressor's last territorial demand.”⁶³¹

Even *New York Times* editor James “Scotty” Reston, erstwhile critic of the administration’s policies in Vietnam, was forced to admit the compelling logic of the domino theory. In a December 1965 article, Reston wrote that, while India and Japan “do not believe in the domino theory...they agree that an American defeat there would gradually lead to the expansion of Peking’s power all over South and East Asia.” Reston concluded: “American defense of Asia is unsatisfactory, and increasingly costly, but it is the only policy there is and the only one in prospect.”⁶³²

While most in the media and the public seemed to support the administration’s use of containment to justify the war in Vietnam, there were growing concerns within the administration that Americans might begin to demand more forceful action. A memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, Bill Moyers, and others from Chester L. Cooper shows the way the administration saw its public relations challenges in late 1965, after the march on Washington.

⁶³¹ Pine Bluff Commercial, “Peace In Our Time,” *Pine Bluff Commercial*, Pine Bluff, AR, 6 December 1965, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶³² James “Scotty” Reston, “United States And Asia: Whose Move Next?” *New York Times*, Tokyo, *St. Petersburg Times*, St. Petersburg, FL, 23 December 1965, 10A.

Cooper described four distinct groups that must be engaged and the strategies to engage each. The first audience, pro-war activists, had generated a “great surge of goodwill which could play a vital role in our efforts,” but Cooper thought that this group should be encouraged and assisted, lest it “die down as dramatically as it has grown.” The second group, the “seventy per cent,” were those Americans who supported the President’s policies, though Cooper worried that “many people probably do not even understand what it is that they are supporting.”⁶³³ Cooper believed the task with this group should be

...to sustain and nourish this support through hostilities with its high casualties, negotiations with its frustrations, settlement with its inevitable compromises, and reconstruction with its high costs.⁶³⁴

The next group, “the Hawks,” fell within the “seventy per cent” and, Cooper predicted, would become increasingly vocal in their demands for more violent means as the November 1966 midterm elections approached. Cooper wrote: “The basic task of surrounding and containing the Hawks will have to be done by the Administration, itself.” The final group Cooper identified was the “Disaffected Left.” Cooper wrote that “the main task here is to separate the confused or worried liberals from the hard-core left-cum-kooks.” The former were “of particular importance, not only in terms of the prestige and respectability they give to the organized protestors of the

⁶³³ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Messrs. Bundy, Moyers and Valenti and Cater, “SUBJECT: The American People, Vietnam and Us,” 14 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶³⁴ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Messrs. Bundy, Moyers and Valenti and Cater, “SUBJECT: The American People, Vietnam and Us,” 14 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

left, but because they can play a useful role in the President's domestic programs." Cooper believed that the administration could "bring them around" by direct engagement.⁶³⁵

The administration's approach to deal with the "seventy percent"⁶³⁶ was to continue to argue for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam using the ideology of containment. This approach seemed to be working. By December 1965, public opinion had swung even more strongly in favor of the President's policies in Vietnam. According to a December Gallup poll, 56 percent of Americans approved the President's handling of Vietnam.⁶³⁷

However, the administration's approach—preaching to the converted about why military intervention was needed in Vietnam using the ideology of military containment—created problems in dealing with the "the Hawks,"⁶³⁸ whom the same Gallup poll showed were a very large percentage of the "seventy percent."⁶³⁹ In December 1965, 59 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion believed that the President should "go all out in bombing North Vietnam

⁶³⁵ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Messrs. Bundy, Moyers and Valenti and Cater, "SUBJECT: The American People, Vietnam and Us," 14 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶³⁶ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Messrs. Bundy, Moyers and Valenti and Cater, "SUBJECT: The American People, Vietnam and Us," 14 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶³⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 721* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 11-16 December 1965), 12-13.

⁶³⁸ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Messrs. Bundy, Moyers and Valenti and Cater, "SUBJECT: The American People, Vietnam and Us," 14 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶³⁹ Chester L. Cooper, memorandum for Messrs. Bundy, Moyers and Valenti and Cater, "SUBJECT: The American People, Vietnam and Us," 14 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

until the Communists are ready to negotiate.”⁶⁴⁰ When asked for specifics, 61 percent Americans who had an opinion did oppose bombing North Vietnamese “big cities,” but an even bigger percentage, 71 percent, favored “bombing industrial plants and factories in North Vietnam.”⁶⁴¹ The administration never effectively communicated to the majority of Americans—who wanted the administration to use more force in Vietnam—why it did not adopt that policy. In fact, only weeks after this poll, Congressional pressure would force the President to antagonize the “Hawks” by implementing a bombing pause.

Some in the administration were deeply concerned about this problem. In a letter in January 1966, Walt Rostow implored the President to level with the American people. The President needed to explain why the United States didn’t “go all-out” in Vietnam. Rostow believed that this would be accepted by the majority of Americans “because 60% of the people are with you—and are always for the right thing when the President takes his stand.” Rostow also believed that this same 60 percent of Americans “needs to feel we are doing our very best—in a good cause—without holding back.” Rostow concluded by telling the President, “That 60% doesn't have to be promised a quick or happy ending.” These Americans, Rostow said, just needed to believe that all that could be done was being done.⁶⁴²

As 1965 came to a close, the administration also faced new troubles in dealing with attacks on its credibility. In November 1965, I.F. Stone initiated a new line of criticism

⁶⁴⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 721* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 11-16 December 1965), 14.

⁶⁴¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0722: Television/Politics* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 31 December 1965-5 January 1966), 13.

⁶⁴² [Walt Rostow], memorandum for President Johnson about explaining his Vietnam policy, 26 January 1966, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (January-March 1966), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

concerning government credibility on the war: that the President was deceptive in his claims that he sought negotiations. Reporting on a recent press conference, Stone wrote that reporters “tried to elicit what standards the government imposes in determining whether peace feelers are ‘serious’ or ‘sincere.’” Stone wrote that the “spokesman retreated behind a smoke-screen of double-talk.” Stone concluded: “The truth...is that we wait for a signal that the other side is ready, not to negotiate, but to surrender.”⁶⁴³

The administration also received other warnings that its credibility on the issue of Vietnam might come into question. After a visit to Vietnam, author, movie producer, and friend of the administration John Secondari warned the administration that it might have a deep problem in credibility with the Saigon press corps. In discussing the daily press briefings by Military Assistance Command-Vietnam—which the press had already taken to calling the “five o’clock follies”—Secondari said, “The Army has no friends among the press.” Secondari blamed the military’s overly optimistic reports on the war for the erosion of credibility.⁶⁴⁴

General Maxwell Taylor, former U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, provided even more ominous warnings about threats to the administration’s credibility in a letter to the President at the end of 1965. From numerous television and public appearances since returning to the U.S., he had drawn the conclusion that “there is...some suspicion that this government is holding back and perhaps concealing some of the facts.” Taylor’s suggestion to address this credibility

⁶⁴³ I.F. Stone, “Time to Tell the Truth for a Change,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, 22 November 1965, reprinted in *The Best of I.F. Stone* by I.F. Stone, ed. By Karl Weber (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 265.

⁶⁴⁴ Jack Valenti, memorandum for President Johnson about John Secondari’s observations of press operations in Vietnam, 10 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

problem was “many more high-level explanations to our people of the basic issues in South Vietnam to give them the feeling of being taken more into the confidence of their government.”⁶⁴⁵

Rather than responding to these warnings about the erosion of his administration’s credibility—or responding to the American public’s demands to be more aggressive in prosecuting the war—the President stubbornly continued to use the ideology of military containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. In his 1966 State of the Union Address, the President painted his policies in Vietnam as, “not an isolated episode, but another great event in the policy that we have followed with strong consistency since World War II.” Vietnam was analogous to the “rebuild[ing of] Western Europe” or U.S. “aid to Greece and Turkey” or the defense of “the freedom of Berlin.” Invoking his predecessors and their Cold War foreign policy achievements, he said, “In this pursuit we have defended against Communist aggression—in Korea under President Truman—in the Formosa Straits under President Eisenhower—in Cuba under President Kennedy—and again in Vietnam.” This current aggression, he added, came from “the ambitions of mainland China.” But war had also come to Vietnam because, “little more than 6 years ago, North Vietnam decided on conquest” and began moving “soldiers and supplies...from North to South in a swelling stream.”⁶⁴⁶ Johnson also argued that the U.S. must honor its commitments to reassure all of its allies, not just South Vietnam. America, Johnson said, had made a “solemn pledge—a pledge which has grown

⁶⁴⁵ Maxwell D. Taylor, letter to President Johnson on goals for Vietnam in 1966, 27 December 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [1 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶⁴⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 12, 1966,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966*. Volume I, entry 6, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 3-12, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1966/01-12-1966.html>.

through the commitments of three American Presidents.” Moreover, Johnson added, “in Asia—and around the world—are countries whose independence rests, in large measure, on confidence in America's word and in America’s protection.”⁶⁴⁷ If the United States failed in South Vietnam, the President concluded, it...

...would weaken that confidence, would undermine the independence of many lands, and would whet the appetite of aggression. We would have to fight in one land, and then we would have to fight in another—or abandon much of Asia to the domination of Communists.⁶⁴⁸

The 1966 Fulbright Hearings

On 4 February 1966, Senator J. William Fulbright’s Committee began hearings to consider the President’s request for an additional \$415 million to fund the war. These hearings were an all-out assault on the administration’s justifications for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of Communism. They represented the first time that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had publicly dissented on a U.S. military intervention since

⁶⁴⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The State of the Union Address of President Johnson to the Congress (Excerpts), January 12, 1966; Department of State Bulletin, January 31, 1966, p. 153,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-64, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁶⁴⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The State of the Union Address of President Johnson to the Congress (Excerpts), January 12, 1966; Department of State Bulletin, January 31, 1966, p. 153,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-64, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

the beginning of the Cold War.⁶⁴⁹ These hearings also marked the first consistent airing of criticism of the war by the national television networks since it had started.⁶⁵⁰

The 1966 Fulbright hearings were a direct attack on the administration's use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The President responded to this threat to his policies in Vietnam by preempting the hearings with a series of publicity events. The administration and the media also responded to the hearings by reasserting that the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia required U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and by attacking opponents of the war as aiding Communists. The administration also occasionally reminded the Congress of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—both as its legal justification for prosecuting the war and as its insurance policy against Congressional dissent. These hearings generated very little new Congressional dissent. The hearings also failed to convince the American people to abandon support for the war. However, the hearings appear to have convinced Senator J. William Fulbright and his staff that they had to weaken the power of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent before they could convince a majority in Congress to oppose the war.

In early 1966, most Americans were still intensely concerned about the war and still largely accepted the administration's argument that the war was necessary in order to contain Communism. A poll conducted by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research found that 60 percent of Americans were worried "a great deal" by the war in Vietnam. This same poll showed that Americans were at least concerned by the possible negative consequences of the domino theory. Of those Americans who expressed an opinion, 68 percent would reject an

⁶⁴⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 500; Gary Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 121-122.

⁶⁵⁰ Williams, "Vietnam," 227-228.

American withdrawal from Vietnam if it “meant eventual control of south Viet Nam by the Viet Cong.” Fully 85 percent of these Americans would reject an American withdrawal from Vietnam if it “meant the eventual loss of independence of other nations like Laos and Thailand.”⁶⁵¹ While this does not necessarily prove that Americans believed the domino theory, it does show that they feared the consequences that it predicted.

Another question showed that Americans had, by a narrow majority, accepted the administration’s claim that the Viet Cong was supported by, or even a proxy force, for the North Vietnamese. When asked “Who are the Viet Cong,” slightly over 50 percent of those Americans who correctly identified them as the United States’ adversaries in South Vietnam said that they were, in fact, “North Vietnamese” with another 36 percent identifying them as “South Vietnamese Communists.”⁶⁵²

Even before the Fulbright hearings began, the President attempted to preempt the event with several moves of his own. First, the President implemented a bombing pause on Christmas Eve 1965. Then, in January 1966, the President sent Vice President Hubert Humphrey, W. Averell Harriman, William Bundy, and Arthur Goldberg to foreign capitals in a very public “peace offensive” to find a negotiated settlement to the war.⁶⁵³ The peace offensive had a dramatic impact in the American press. “The U.S. Peace Offensive And The Communist

⁶⁵¹ Richard A. Brody, Paul Ekman, Edwin B. Parker, Nelson W. Polsby, Peter H. Rossi, Paul B. Sheatsley, Sidney Verba, *Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam* (Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, Winter 1966), 4-5, 14-15.

⁶⁵² Richard A. Brody, Paul Ekman, Edwin B. Parker, Nelson W. Polsby, Peter H. Rossi, Paul B. Sheatsley, Sidney Verba, *Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam* (Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, Winter 1966), 18.

⁶⁵³ James G. Hershberg, “Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause: Hungarian and Polish Diplomacy During the Vietnam War, December 1965-January 1966,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2003): 32-67.

Response” was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine.⁶⁵⁴ In their syndicated column, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak were hopeful of the prospects for peace. However, even these sympathetic commentators admitted that the offensive was also aimed at “muffling the peaceniks.”⁶⁵⁵

Not all of the coverage of the peace offensive was positive. As the bombing pause came to a close, the *New York Times*' Drew Middleton took the opportunity to attack the administration's justification of the war as a means of containing Communism. Middleton claimed that “the ‘falling domino’ theory...is rejected by all but a few diplomats.” He did admit that those “few” included countries in Southeast Asia. Middleton also attacked the administration's argument about the lessons of Munich: “Few critics are impressed by the parallel...between Southeast Asia now and Europe in the nineteen-thirties, when Hitler was on the move.” Middleton added: “Communist spokesmen tell [Asian and African countries] at every opportunity that it is the Americans, not the Chinese, who are following Hitler's course.”⁶⁵⁶

The American people clearly took notice of the peace offensive. According to internal White House polling conducted by Research Council, Inc., fully 60 percent of Americans were aware of the peace offensive only a week after it began. More importantly for the President, 63 percent of Americans approved of the peace offensive, once told that it was occurring. The same

⁶⁵⁴ Time, “U.S. Peace Offensive,” *Time*, 14 January 1966, cover.

⁶⁵⁵ Rowland Evans, Robert Novak, “Shelepin: Viet Nam Peace Key?” *St. Petersburg Times*, St. Petersburg, FL, 4 January 1966, 11-A

⁶⁵⁶ Drew Middleton, “The U.N. Peace Outcry: U.S. Likely to Face Rising Criticism if Bombing Starts,” United Nations, New York, *New York Times*, 28 January 1966, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

percentage believed that the President was doing an “excellent” or “pretty good” job in handling the war in Vietnam.⁶⁵⁷

However, this same poll revealed more troubling signals that Americans were beginning to question the administration’s credibility on Vietnam. This polling did show that confidence in the authenticity of the President’s desire for peace had increased markedly. In a poll conducted by CBS a few weeks before the offensive, only 44 percent of Americans said that “the Johnson Administration is doing as much as it should” to negotiate a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. A week after the offensive began, that percentage had risen to 57 percent. However, when Americans were asked if they believed “that important information the public should have is being held back,” only 38 percent of Americans answered that they were being told “all they ought to know.” Forty-eight percent flatly responded that they suspected “information [was] being held back.” The pollsters concluded that the American public had “some reservations when it comes to the Administration's credibility.”⁶⁵⁸

The administration’s second effort to mute the effect of the Fulbright hearings was a conference in Honolulu with the leaders of South Vietnam.⁶⁵⁹

The event itself was political theater designed to prove the administration’s arguments that the war was needed to contain Communism. The highly publicized conference included General William Westmoreland, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert

⁶⁵⁷ Research Council, Inc., “PUBLIC OPINION POLL ON THE ‘PEACE OFFENSIVE’ AND STEEL PRICES,” Princeton, NJ, 6 January [1966], box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [1 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶⁵⁸ Research Council, Inc., “PUBLIC OPINION POLL ON THE ‘PEACE OFFENSIVE’ AND STEEL PRICES,” Princeton, NJ, 6 January [1966], box 80 [1 of 2], folder PR16 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS (April 1964-June 1965) [1 of 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶⁵⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 459.

McNamara, and large White House and State Department public affairs teams. In a press conference, General Westmoreland told reporters that as many as one third of the regiments that American ground forces faced in South Vietnam were from North Vietnam. President Thieu thanked the United States for the casualties it had suffered to protect South Vietnamese “freedom.”⁶⁶⁰ In a speech during the conference, the President harkened to the lessons of Munich. “We cannot accept [dissenters’] logic that tyranny 10,000 miles away is not tyranny to concern us,” Johnson said, “or that subjugation by an armed minority in Asia is different from subjugation by an armed minority in Europe.” The President added: “In the forties and fifties we took our stand in Europe to protect the freedom of those threatened by aggression.” The President asked: “If we had not then acted, what kind of Europe might there be today?” Johnson concluded: “If we allow the Communists to win in Viet-Nam, it will become easier and more appetizing for them to take over other countries in other parts of the world. We will have to fight again someplace else—at what cost no one knows.”⁶⁶¹

During a late night event upon the President’s return to Washington, the President announced that he was sending Vice President Humphrey to Saigon and other Asian capitals to secure additional support for the U.S. effort in Vietnam. In a brief speech implicitly deriding the expected dissident tone of the upcoming Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings, the President said: “The road ahead may be long and may be difficult. It will require the unflinching

⁶⁶⁰ US Army, “US Army Staff Film Report 66-7A,” National Archives, Washington, DC, accessed 27 April 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKAG6ywn01Y>

⁶⁶¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by President Johnson, U.S. and South Vietnamese leaders meet at Honolulu, February 6, 1966; Department of State Bulletin, February 28, 1966, p. 303,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-64, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

unity of our people in support of the courageous young Americans who...are tonight fighting and suffering for us.”⁶⁶² The message was clear: Americans—including protesters and dissenters in the Senate—needed to get behind the war effort and support the troops.

The press was generally skeptical of the Honolulu conference, especially the promise to emerge from the conference to refocus the war effort on pacification. The *New York Post* wrote that while the conference sought to change the focus from defeating North Vietnam to pacifying South Vietnam, “the session inadvertently underscored the lack of interest of the junta in Saigon in anything but military conquest of the Viet Cong, to be carried out by stepped up U.S. armed efforts.”⁶⁶³

The Honolulu Conference may, in fact, have hurt rather than helped the administration in building public support for its policies in Vietnam. Before the conference, 57 percent of Americans approved of the President’s handling of Vietnam.⁶⁶⁴ A week after the Honolulu conference that percentage had slipped to just over 50 percent.⁶⁶⁵

The final act of preemptive sabotage against the Fulbright hearings came not from Washington but from Saigon. Barry Zorthian, chief public affairs coordinator in the U.S.

⁶⁶² Walter Cronkite, Harry Reasoner, Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, “LBJ meets VP Humphrey On return [sic] from Hawaii,” *CBS Special Report*, CBS, 8 February 1966, Video # MP565, “Meeting with Vice President Humphrey upon return from Hawaii, February 8, 1966,” Motion Pictures, Audiovisual Materials, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶⁶³ New York Post, *New York Post*, 9 February 1966, Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War. Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968, Volume VIII—Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967, 49, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁶⁶⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0723: Politics/Alcohol* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 21-26 January 1966), 8.

⁶⁶⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0724: Lyndon Johnson/Vietnam War* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-15 February 1966), 15-16.

embassy in Saigon, was instrumental in getting a story run in the *Washington Post* in the first days of the Fulbright hearings that accused the Congress of destroying U.S. and South Vietnamese morale and bolstering morale in North Vietnam and the broader Communist world.⁶⁶⁶ Ward Just, the article's author, specifically cited Senator Robert F. Kennedy's proposal to "give the Vietcong...a share in a post war Vietnamese government." (Kennedy's actual proposal was simply to give the National Liberation Front a seat at negotiations in order to get negotiations started.) Just quoted South Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky as accusing Kennedy "of using 'the destiny of 20 million people' as an issue in the 1968 presidential campaign." Just quoted a U.S. official as saying of the Kennedy proposal, "To legitimize the Vietcong is to legitimize terrorism, and we do not see how, if this is done, the government here can last." Likewise, Just wrote that the "reaction to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings" was "almost total dismay." He quoted a cavalry officer as saying: "[Troops] can understand draft card burners.... What they can't understand is U.S. Senators criticizing what we're doing here." U.S. officials believed that the time for debate had passed, Just wrote, and "that now we need some closing of ranks."⁶⁶⁷

Not all media criticism of dissenters was instigated by the administration. *U.S. News & World Report* reprinted an editorial by Alan McIntosh, publisher of the *Rock County Herald* in Luverne, Minnesota. The editorial, titled "I am a tired American," decried the incessant criticism

⁶⁶⁶ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 420; Jack Valenti, note to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge on news story planted by Barry Zorthian, 24 March 1966, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (January-March 1966), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX); Henry Cabot Lodge, note to Jack Valenti on news story planted by Barry Zorthian, 19 March 1966, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (January-March 1966), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶⁶⁷ Ward Just, "Debate in U.S. Dismays Officials at Saigon," Saigon, *Washington Post*, 27 February 1966, A18, in box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (January-March 1966), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

of the United States at home and abroad.⁶⁶⁸ However, McIntosh also had criticism for the administration:

I am a tired American—who gets more than a little bit weary of the clique in our State Department which chooses to regard a policy of timidity as prudent—the same group which subscribes to a “no win” policy in Vietnam.⁶⁶⁹

The administration had still done nothing to address its problem with “the Hawks” who supported the war in Vietnam but wanted more forceful action.

Senator J. William Fulbright’s hearings on the administration’s supplemental request to prosecute the war in Vietnam, which began on 4 February 1966, were a televised assault on the administration’s arguments that the war was needed in order to contain Communism.⁶⁷⁰ One of the Committee’s first witnesses, former ambassador to France Lt. Gen. (ret.) James Gavin, warned that the American effort in Vietnam was likely to draw Communist China into the war. Gavin also warned that the U.S. commitment in Vietnam was “alarmingly out of balance” with U.S. interests in the region. Gavin also predicted that the administration was “slowly creeping”

⁶⁶⁸ Alan McIntosh [Publisher, *Rock County Herald*, Luverne, Minn.], “I AM A TIRED AMERICAN,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 14 February 1966, 120, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁶⁹ Alan McIntosh [Publisher, *Rock County Herald*, Luverne, Minn.], “I AM A TIRED AMERICAN,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 14 February 1966, 120, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁷⁰ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, announcement of meeting on 21 February 1966 and agenda, [February 1966], Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

toward “the bombing of Hanoi or Peking,” which he said would “achieve little” except further souring world opinion.⁶⁷¹

Former ambassador to the Soviet Union—and key author of America’s ideology of containment—George F. Kennan attacked the administration’s use of containment to justify the war as well. Kennan was adamant that “deliberate expansion” of the conflict in vain pursuit of “something called ‘victory’” was futile. Kennan also took aim at the Honolulu Conference under way at the time; while he stopped short of questioning the President’s credibility, he did say it was “something less than consistent” to hold the conference just as the peace offensive was collapsing. Kennan concluded by attacking the administration’s argument that it was protecting the credibility of its worldwide commitments; Kennan argued that the world would respect the United States more if it succeeded in a “resolute and courageous liquidation of unsound positions” instead of continuing its “stubborn pursuit of extravagant or unpromising objectives.”⁶⁷²

As the Fulbright hearings raged, the press remained largely supportive of the administration’s use of containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Foreign correspondent C.L. Sulzberger wrote in the *New York Times* that Vietnam was an obligation that the United States was “forced to assume” as a result of World War II and the collapse of imperialism. Sulzberger wrote that “President Eisenhower resolved to prevent collapse of Southeast Asia and the rush of a new imperial dynamism down to Australia’s border,” a policy

⁶⁷¹ E.W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “GAVIN WARNS U.S. CHINA MAY FIGHT: Says a Build-Up in Vietnam Would ...,” *New York Times*, 9 February 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁶⁷² E. W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “KENNAN BIDS U.S. 'DIG IN' AND AWAIT TALKS IN VIETNAM: Diplomat ...,” *New York Times*, 11 February 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

that was as “unpopular” as “the Truman Doctrine” when it was originally asserted in Greece. Sulzberger went on to argue that the administration’s policies in Vietnam were, like those in Korea, Greece, and Iran before them, intended to contain Communism. Sulzberger wrote: “The present showdown in Vietnam...seeks to prevent a hostile, dynamic tide from running across Thailand and Malaya to Singapore.” Sulzberger also initiated a new argument that would eventually become a staple of the administration’s case for the war.⁶⁷³ Sulzberger argued that there were positive consequences of the domino theory; as the United States held the line in Vietnam, the other countries in Southeast Asia grew stronger and more resistant to Communism.

Since 1954 when we first became involved in Vietnam, significant changes have occurred in the Far Eastern position. Russia and China have split. Indonesia has reversed its pro-Chinese line. The British finally crushed the Malayan Communist rebellion and set up independent Malaysia.... It would be silly to consider all these events unrelated to Vietnam.⁶⁷⁴

Sulzberger insisted: “It is wrong to simplify the issue by such phrases as ‘domino theory.’” But this did not stop Sulzberger from restating the theory’s precepts: “if we crawl out of Vietnam now it is obvious that Southeast Asia right down to Australia will join our adversaries and that India will be outflanked.” Sulzberger also warned that “Western Europe, which often voices doubts about our resolve, would have such doubts multiplied.”⁶⁷⁵

Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s opening statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was a nationally televised history lesson, designed to communicate that three

⁶⁷³ C.L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Power and the Unloved One,” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 27 February 1966, E10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁶⁷⁴ C.L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Power and the Unloved One,” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 27 February 1966, E10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁶⁷⁵ C.L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Power and the Unloved One,” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 27 February 1966, E10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

presidents, beginning with President Eisenhower, saw the Vietnam War as “deeply intertwined” with U.S. national security and warned that “the loss of South Viet-Nam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom,” as “the remaining countries of Southeast Asia would be menaced” by Communist expansion. Rusk acknowledged that “this view has often been referred to as the ‘domino theory,’” but insisted that “I personally do not believe in such a theory if it means belief in a law of nature which requires the collapse of each neighboring state in an inevitable sequence.” But Rusk still claimed that he was “deeply impressed with the probable effects worldwide...if the ‘war of liberation’ scores a significant victory there.” He claimed that President Kennedy harbored this same concern.⁶⁷⁶

Rusk recounted the many commitments the United States had made to South Vietnam, including the “fundamental SEATO obligation,” assurances given by President Eisenhower to assist South Vietnam in “resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means,” and declarations by President Kennedy that “the Republic of Viet-Nam shall not be lost to the Communists for lack of any support which the United States can render.”⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁶ Dean Rusk, “Statement by Secretary Rusk Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, February 18, 1966, ‘The U.S. Commitment in Viet-Nam: Fundamental issues’ (Broadcast Live on Nationwide Television Networks); Department of State Bulletin, March 7, 1966, p. 346,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-65-69, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁶⁷⁷ Dean Rusk, “Statement by Secretary Rusk Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, February 18, 1966, ‘The U.S. Commitment in Viet-Nam: Fundamental issues’ (Broadcast Live on Nationwide Television Networks); Department of State Bulletin, March 7, 1966, p. 346,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-65-69, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

During the 1966 Fulbright Hearings, Republican former Vice President Richard M. Nixon reentered the political fray, firmly supporting containment as a justification for intervention in Vietnam. In a pep talk to Congressional Republican administrative assistants, Nixon said that the purpose of the war was “denying the Communists any reward for their aggression.” Nixon then listed the dangers of not seeing the war to a successful conclusion; this list was a catalogue of the administration’s arguments for the war. Nixon argued that abandoning Vietnam would be a death sentence for South Vietnamese “anti-Communists,” condemn Laos and Thailand to Communist domination, and put Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia at mortal risk. However, Nixon most feared that abandoning Vietnam would destroy the credibility of the United States’ worldwide commitments. If the United States gave the Communists a “reward for aggression,” Nixon concluded, “the U.S. would be forced to fight other wars...[which] would begin to loom down the road.”⁶⁷⁸

While the Fulbright hearings raged, Vice President Hubert Humphrey continued his visits to Asian capitals ostensibly to enlist additional support for the war in Vietnam. Upon his return, the Vice President summarized his findings in a press release that used the containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The release said the war was “a broad effort to restrain the attempt by Asian Communists to expand by force—as we assisted our European allies in resisting Communist expansion in Europe after World War II.” In an implicit proof of the domino theory, Humphrey also argued that “most Asian leaders are concerned about the belligerence and militancy of Communist China's attitudes.” Humphrey concluded by making a thinly veiled attack on Senator J. William Fulbright and his hearings; the press release

⁶⁷⁸ John Chamberlain, “These Days: Nixon Makes a Terrific Impact on Bull Elephants,” King Features Syndicate, *Park City Daily News*, Bowling Green, KY, 10 March 1966, 3, 4.

claimed that Asian leaders were concerned about “whether our American purpose, tenacity and will were strong enough to persevere in Southeast Asia.” The release noted that Humphrey reassured these leaders of America’s “firmness of our resolve but also our dedication to the rights of free discussion and dissent.”⁶⁷⁹ In other words, Senatorial dissent was disheartening the United States’ Asian allies. A few days later, Humphrey launched a similar attack on Congressional dissenters, suggesting they were aiding Communists with their dissent.⁶⁸⁰

The media was generally unsupportive of the hearings on Vietnam in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Syndicated columnist Holmes Alexander wrote specifically about the contrasting testimony by Prof. Robert Scalapino, a supporter of the administration’s Vietnam policy, and Prof. Hans Morgenthau, who had dissented from the administration’s Vietnam policy since mid-1964. Alexander wrote: “The hawkishness of Scalapino is not jingoism, but the dovishness of Morgenthau is very close to defeatism.” Scalapino, Alexander wrote, “bids us hold our ground.... That firmness will avert the awesome either/or choice of World War III or surrender.” Morgenthau, Alexander wrote, “bids us to give way slowly.... Says there is wisdom in weakness and that our determination to fight it out in Asia ‘ought to be gradually liquidated.’” Holmes also wrote that the two men differed on how to respond to the rise of China as a world

⁶⁷⁹ Hubert Humphrey, “Vice President Humphrey Reports to President on Asian Trip, White House Press Release of March 6, 1966; Department of State Bulletin, March 28, 1966, p. 490,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-72-73, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁶⁸⁰ Hubert Humphrey, “Address by Vice President Humphrey at National Press Club, Washington, D.C., March 11, 1966, ‘United States Tasks and Responsibilities in Asia’; Department of State Bulletin, April 4, 1966, p. 523,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-73-74, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

power. Holmes characterized Scalapino's policy prescription as "military containment" and Morgenthau's preferred policy as "appeasement." Morgenthau, Holmes added, believed that the domino theory was a "myth" and that, "if we do not change our policy, we must be ready to go to war" with China.⁶⁸¹

The hearings themselves captivated the American public. A Mutual Broadcast survey from late February found that nearly three quarters of American men and two thirds of American women had heard about the hearings. And 60 percent of those Americans who had heard about the hearings had watched at least part of the hearings on television.⁶⁸²

Fulbright was keen to capitalize on the attention his hearings had attracted. As early as 28 February 1966, before the hearings were even over, J. William Fulbright had secured an agreement with Random House to publish a transcript of the hearings.⁶⁸³ In fact, as the power and reach of the Committee hearings grew, Fulbright became bolder, even publicly inviting Vice President Hubert Humphrey to appear before the Committee in executive session to report on his recent trip to Asia.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸¹ Holmes Alexander, "How to Live With a Giant," Washington, DC, *Rome News-Tribune*, Rome, GA, 13 April 1966, 4.

⁶⁸² Hayes Redmond, memorandum to Bill Moyers on public awareness of Fulbright Hearings, 27 February 1966, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (January-March 1966), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁶⁸³ Robert Bernstein [President, Random House], letter to Senator J. William Fulbright expressing gratitude for deciding to publish 1966 Vietnam hearings and agreeing to write the forward, 28 February 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁸⁴ J. William Fulbright, letter Vice President Humphrey inviting him to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, 25 February 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR); US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, press release on visit of Vice President Humphrey with Senate Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 1 March 1966, Series 48

The hearings, while a dramatic attack on the ideology of containment and its application to Vietnam, failed to generate much additional Congressional dissent. In fact, Democratic Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia was one of the only Members of Congress to join Fulbright in opposition to the war after the hearings. Russell suggested in a *U.S. News & World Report* interview that he favored a poll of the South Vietnamese people to determine if they wanted the United States military to remain in their country. “We can’t possibly win,” Russell said, “if we are fighting an enemy in front of us while the people we are supposed to be helping are against us and want us out of their country.” Russell also explicitly rejected the domino theory. While he acknowledged that “Cambodia and Laos might go, along with South Vietnam,” Russell said, “neither of them has any tremendous military value.”⁶⁸⁵ Russell said the United States made a mistake by committing its prestige “when our own interest is not directly involved.”⁶⁸⁶ Russell continued: “It’s time we re-examine our entire position, however painful that re-examination might be.” Russell concluded: “It wouldn’t be easy for us to extricate ourselves, but we could do it.” However, the heart of Russell’s dissent was that the administration was not being aggressive enough in prosecuting the war. Russell insisted: “We should go in and win—or else get out,”⁶⁸⁷ including the immediate blockade of the port of

FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁸⁵ Felix Belair Jr., “Russell Favors A Poll In Vietnam On U.S. Presence: Says ‘We Can’t Possibly Win’ Against Vietcong if People Oppose American Help,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1966, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁶⁸⁶ Max Frankel, “Russell’s appraisal of war will have bearing on future,” Washington, *New York Times, Press-Courier*, Oxnard, CA, 27 April 1966, 8.

⁶⁸⁷ Felix Belair Jr., “Russell Favors A Poll In Vietnam On U.S. Presence: Says ‘We Can’t Possibly Win’ Against Vietcong if People Oppose American Help,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1966, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Haiphong and the bombing of Hanoi.⁶⁸⁸ By failing to address those Americans who wanted more aggressive use of force in Vietnam, the President had succeeded in alienating the most influential member of the Senate, a man whose support he very much needed.

The press did understand the significance of Russell's dissent. For instance, Max Frankel of the *New York Times* noted that Russell's dissent would be "influential in shaping the attitude of Congress toward the administration's conduct of the war" because "no member of Congress is held in higher respect for the integrity of his character and the care he expends in reaching conclusions."⁶⁸⁹

The reason for this absence of new Congressional dissent may have been the President's insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Throughout the Fulbright hearings, the administration never fully invoked the Resolution. However, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist John M. Hightower did. In an Associated Press article recapping how the United States became embroiled in the Vietnam War, Hightower explained that the President relied on his powers as commander in chief and the SEATO treaty. However, Hightower added, "Johnson relies much more on a resolution which Congress adopted in August 1964, shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents." Hightower faithfully recounted the administration's version of the events of 4 August 1964⁶⁹⁰ and then added:

The resolution stated that Congress "approves and supports" the determination of the President "as commander in chief" to take all necessary measures to repel attacks

⁶⁸⁸ Max Frankel, "Russell's appraisal of war will have bearing on future," Washington, *New York Times*, *Press-Courier*, Oxnard, CA, 27 April 1966, 8.

⁶⁸⁹ Max Frankel, "Russell's appraisal of war will have bearing on future," Washington, *New York Times*, *Press-Courier*, Oxnard, CA, 27 April 1966, 8.

⁶⁹⁰ John M. Hightower, "Just How Did U.S. Get Into Present Viet Fix?" Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Tuscaloosa News*, Tuscaloosa, FL, 3 February 1966, 1-2.

against U.S. forces “and to prevent further aggression.”⁶⁹¹

Hightower added that Senator J. William Fulbright “was strategist for the resolution in the Senate” and that the resolution’s “purpose was to show congressional support for the President’s course in Viet Nam.”⁶⁹²

There is no direct documentary evidence, but it appears that Senator J. William Fulbright may have believed the reason more Members of Congress had not joined his dissent was because of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. As the hearings drew to a close, Fulbright and his staff concluded that they must weaken this Resolution and that the avenue of that attack should be “the question of a declaration of war” and the legal basis for the war in Vietnam, which the Committee staff believed was an issue on which the administration was vulnerable. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chief of staff Carl Marcy believed this presented the opportunity to limit the powers the President claimed he had been granted by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.⁶⁹³ Marcy suggested that the administration’s supplemental spending bill be accompanied by a “sense of the Senate” rider that would amend the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in a way that tied the President’s hands; it would insist that “the President...not expand the war without asking for a declaration of war.”⁶⁹⁴ In the end this amendment was never even formally introduced in the Senate Foreign Relations

⁶⁹¹ John M. Hightower, “Just How Did U.S. Get Into Present Viet Fix?” Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Tuscaloosa News*, Tuscaloosa, FL, 3 February 1966, 1-2.

⁶⁹² John M. Hightower, “Just How Did U.S. Get Into Present Viet Fix?” Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Tuscaloosa News*, Tuscaloosa, FL, 3 February 1966, 1-2.

⁶⁹³ [Carl Marcy], “Points to Make on Sense of Congress Amendment,” point paper [from Carl Marcy to Senator J. William Fulbright], Washington, DC, 28 February 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁶⁹⁴ [Carl Marcy], “Points to Make on Sense of Congress Amendment,” point paper [from Carl Marcy to Senator J. William Fulbright], Washington, DC, 28 February 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Committee. The hearings had focused on disputing the applicability of the ideology of containment of Communism to the war in Vietnam; Fulbright had failed to build a case with his colleagues or the American public against the President's legal basis for prosecuting the war. Thus, after the 1966 Fulbright hearings, the administration's insurance policy against Congressional dissent remained intact.

On balance, the 1966 Fulbright Hearings on the Vietnam War had little impact on public opinion about the war. Fulbright did succeed in getting Americans to talk about the war. A Gallup poll after the hearings found that a plurality of Americans said that the Vietnam War was the main topic of conversation with family and friends during the week after the hearings. And public support for the President's handling of the war dropped two percentage points to 48 percent after the hearings. But the 42 percent of Americans who disapproved of the President's handling of Vietnam did not necessarily agree with Senator Fulbright. Of those who disapproved, 18 percent believed the United States "should be more aggressive" and "go all out" in Vietnam. Another five percent believed the United States "should either go all out or get out" of Vietnam, and another two percent believed "more men and more material [were] needed."⁶⁹⁵ In other words, over a quarter of those who disapproved of the President's handling of the war disapproved because they wanted him to escalate the war further.

It also appears that the administration and its supporters had succeeded in convincing many Americans that Fulbright was aiding the enemy. When Americans were specifically asked in early May about Senator Fulbright, only 36 percent of respondents claimed to know Fulbright's position on the war. When those 36 percent were asked what his position was, over

⁶⁹⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0727: Vietnam/Politics/UFOs/Safety Standards in Automobiles* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 14-19 April 1966), 6-8, 22-25.

half said they disagreed with his position. Also, of those who did know anything about Fulbright's position, seven percent provided other derogatory descriptions of his position, eight percent said he gave "aid and comfort to our enemies," and almost one percent said he was a "Communist." In other words, nearly two thirds of Americans had no idea what Fulbright's position was on the war, while another sixth of Americans knew his position and disagreed with it.⁶⁹⁶

In April, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee resumed hearings, this time on a \$3.4 billion foreign aid bill. The issue of Vietnam dominated these hearings as well. And the arguments in these hearings continued to be over the applicability of the ideology of containment to the war in Vietnam. In testimony in this hearing, former U.S. ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith said he "never believed in the simplicities of the 'domino theory,'" citing the resiliency of Indonesia and Thailand to Communist influence as just two counter-examples. Galbraith called South Vietnam "the wrong place to make a stand" against Communist expansion. Galbraith insisted that South Vietnam was not "vital to the security of the United States" and added, "If we were not in Vietnam, all that part of the world would be enjoying the obscurity it so richly deserves." Galbraith's policy prescription was the same he had suggested to the President in a private letter the previous year, just before the President's July 1965 announcement of the deployment of large numbers of U.S. Army soldiers. Galbraith suggested that U.S. troops retreat to easily defensible enclaves and sue for peace.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0728: Politics/Vietnam/Political Parties/Recreation* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 5-10 May 1966), 17-19.

⁶⁹⁷ Felix Belair Jr., "Russell Favors A Poll In Vietnam On U.S. Presence: Says 'We Can't Possibly Win' Against Vietcong if People Oppose American Help," *New York Times*, 26 April 1966, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Secretaries Rusk and McNamara testified several more times before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in late spring 1966, after the formal hearings on Vietnam had ended. At each of these engagements, the Secretaries reiterated the administration's arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on the ideology of containment of Communism. Neither addressed the public's demands for more aggressive action in Vietnam or growing questions about administration credibility on the war.

Secretary McNamara met a hostile audience when he appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in late April. He claimed that the war was a result of North Vietnamese aggression and that nearly 5,000 soldiers infiltrated each month, many of them North Vietnamese Army units. While not wanting to sound "optimistic," McNamara still claimed that Vietnamese prisoners of war "expect that U.S. and government forces will win with their superior equipment and supplies." Senator Morse argued that victory or negotiated settlement was no closer in Vietnam. McNamara responded that, had U.S. troops "not been introduced...the Vietcong and North Vietnam would have won." McNamara also revived the "bloodbath" argument, claiming that the North Vietnamese "would have slaughtered thousands and probably tens of thousands of South Vietnamese." In response to McNamara's insistence that without U.S. intervention "all of Southeast Asia would be in turmoil," Senator Morse responded, "That's a repetition in another form of the old fallacious domino theory."⁶⁹⁸

In response to the Fulbright hearings, the administration contemplated seeking a second Congressional resolution, similar to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, to reassert Congressional endorsement of the Vietnam War. In meetings on the matter in February 1966, Secretaries Rusk

⁶⁹⁸ Felix Belair Jr., "M'namara Says Foe's Hopes Fade: Tells Senate Panel Bombs Affect Vietcong Moral and Spur Desertions," *New York Times*, 12 May 1966, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

and McNamara and Presidential advisor Clark Clifford all opposed such a measure. Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency for Plans Richard Helms (who would become the Director of the CIA four months later) wrote to White House aide Bill Moyers, warning that any significant Congressional opposition to a new resolution would be interpreted by Hanoi as an erosion of support for the war. Helms added that this “would strengthen the North Vietnamese Government in its consistent belief that domestic pressure is going to force the President to stand down the war and bring about an outcome similar to that which occurred with France in 1954.”⁶⁹⁹ The administration knew that Congressional opposition to the war was growing, and it did not wish to test the strength of that opposition, especially before an international audience.

Members of the administration—who had consistently viewed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent—also did not feel that an additional resolution was needed. State Department legal advisor Leonard Meeker wrote a detailed legal opinion listing the legal authorities under which the President was able to prosecute the war in Vietnam. Among those authorities were “the constitutional powers of the President” and “the SEATO treaty.” But the President was also given authority by the Congress, Meeker added, “in the joint resolution of August 10, 1964, and in authorization and appropriations acts for support of the U.S. military effort in Viet-Nam.” These authorities, Meeker concluded, obviated the necessity of a declaration of war or another resolution.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁹ Richard Helms, memorandum for Bill Moyers on seeking a second Congressional Resolution, 23 February 1966, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (January-March 1966), Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷⁰⁰ Leonard C. Meeker, “Legal Memorandum Prepared by Leonard C. Meeker, State Department Legal Adviser, for Submission to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, March 4, 1966, ‘The Legality of United States Participation in the Defense of Viet-Nam’; Department of State Bulletin, March 28, 1966, pp. 15-16,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--

The administration clearly understood that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was a powerful weapon against growing dissent in Congress. And while the administration never fully invoked their insurance policy during the hearings, Dean Rusk did remind Senator Fulbright and the other Senators of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about Tonkin Gulf Resolution during his testimony in May 1966. Rusk argued that the President's authority to fight the war "stems from the constitutional powers of the President as Commander in Chief." But, Rusk added, the President also received authority from "the SEATO treaty, which forms part of the law of the land" and from "the Congress, in a joint resolution of August 1964 and in authorization and appropriation acts in support of the military effort in Viet-Nam." Rusk insisted that these acts showed the Congress had "given its approval and support to the President's action." Rusk concluded that precedents such as "the undeclared war with France in 1798-1800 and... actions in Korea and Lebanon" had established that a declaration of war was not required to fight the Vietnam War.⁷⁰¹

Rusk came closer to wielding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent later in May at a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. He insisted:

The resolution of August 1964, which the House of Representatives adopted unanimously and the Senate with only two negative votes, said that "the United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of

The Johnson Administration, D-70, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁷⁰¹ Dean Rusk, "Statement of Secretary Rusk Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on May 9, 1966, 'Background of U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia'; Department of State Bulletin, May 30, 1966, p. 830," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D-- The Johnson Administration, D-78-81, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

international peace and security in Southeast Asia.” It also said that “the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.”⁷⁰²

Rusk did not mention Senator Fulbright by name or attack him for his change of heart, but the implication was clear. The resolution was an immutable fact, a Congressional endorsement that had not been formally withdrawn despite the present sentiments of some members of Congress.

Meanwhile, most in the media continued to echo the administration’s use of containment to justify the war. *New York Times* columnist C.L. Sulzberger wrote that the credibility of U.S. commitments was at issue in Vietnam. “Face in the Orient can become a matter of overriding importance,” Sulzberger wrote, “even transcending pragmatic reality.” He added: “For both the United States and China this is now true of the Vietnam war.” Indirectly attacking dissenters, he wrote: “No matter how apologists might pretend, there would be changes all over Asia and declining respect for our resolution and the worth of our guarantees.” In India, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and across Asia, Sulzberger added, a “trend would set in for accommodation with our enemies.” Sulzberger wrote that Chinese credibility was also at stake in Vietnam—the credibility of its claims that its methods of “revolutionary or people’s warfare” were more viable than the Soviet Union’s method of peaceful coexistence. “The validity of China’s global pretensions

⁷⁰² Dean Rusk, “Address by Secretary Rusk Before the Council on Foreign Relations at new York, New York on May 24, 1966, ‘Organizing the Peace for Man’s Survival’; Department of State Bulletin, June 13, 1966, p. 926,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-81-83, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

could be either affirmed or denied in Vietnam,” Sulzberger concluded, “much as the validity of U.S. claims to power paramountcy [sic] could...be affirmed or denied.”⁷⁰³

Buddhist Unrest

Late spring 1966 brought a series of setbacks for the administration in Vietnam. The public reaction to these setbacks was to demand more aggressive action by the U.S. military in Vietnam. The administration first tried to answer these demands by once more insisting that the containment of Communism required U.S. military intervention in Vietnam—a sentiment with which most Americans already agreed. When that failed to arrest the drop in approval of the President’s handling of the war, the administration finally responded by bombing Hanoi and Haiphong for the first time—justifying its actions as a tit-for-tat response to North Vietnamese escalations. This escalation finally restored public approval the administration’s policies in Vietnam, but also generated additional Congressional dissent. Still, this entire episode highlighted the fact that the administration had done nothing to explain to the majority of Americans who wanted more aggressive action in Vietnam why it could not escalate the conflict more rapidly.

On 13 April 1966, a dramatic Viet Cong mortar attack on the Tan Son Nhut airbase in Saigon killed eight, including seven Americans, and wounded 160 U.S. and South Vietnamese servicemen. The attack also destroyed twelve U.S. helicopters and nine other aircraft.⁷⁰⁴ At the same time, South Vietnamese Prime Minister Ky launched a crackdown on Buddhist troops in Da Nang that had turned against the government, followed by a second offensive against a force

⁷⁰³ C. L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Logic of the Bursting Shell,” Hong Kong, *New York Times*, 8 May 1966, 10E.

⁷⁰⁴ *New York Times*, “Saigon’s Air Base Shelled; 8 Dead and 160 Wounded: SAIGON’S AIR BASE SHELLED BY REDS,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

of similar Buddhist troops in Hue.⁷⁰⁵ Buddhists responded with a round of self-immolations by Buddhist monks and nuns. The President himself was forced to respond to these dramatic protests, calling the immolations “tragic and unnecessary.”⁷⁰⁶

These setbacks in South Vietnam correlated with a drop in public support for the administration’s policies in Vietnam. Approval of the President’s handling of Vietnam dipped seven points to 41 percent, with 38 percent disapproving and 22 percent having “no opinion.”⁷⁰⁷ A poll a few weeks later showed a further erosion of public support for the President’s handling of the war. Approval of the President’s policies in Vietnam had slipped another percentage point, down to 40 percent. More dangerous for the administration, for the first time more Americans (42 percent) disapproved than approved of the President’s handling of the war.⁷⁰⁸

But this poll also revealed that the public was reacting to bad news in Vietnam rather than to actions by antiwar protesters in the United States or the growing antiwar bloc in the Senate. Most Americans still wanted to fight the war. When asked if they would vote to continue the war if they had the opportunity, 58 percent of those Americans who had an opinion said they would. When those Americans who disapproved of the President’s handling of the war were asked why

⁷⁰⁵ Charles Mohr, Special to *The New York Times*, “KY GOES TO DANANG WITH A REGIMENT TO REASSERT RULE: 1,500 Men Flown to U.S. Base Troops in City Set Up Roadblocks PROTEST MARCHES GROW Tear Gas Fired in Capital Demonstrators in Dalat Burn Radio Station KY IS IN DANANG WITH REGIMENT,” *New York Times*, 5 April 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁰⁶ John D. Pomfret, Special to *The New York Times*, “JOHNSON DEPLORES BUDDHIST SUICIDES: At Arlington, He Says Tragic Protest in Vietnam Clouds Gains Toward Stability,” *New York Times*, 31 May 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁰⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0728: Politics/Vietnam/Political Parties/Recreation* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 5-10 May 1966), 12-13.

⁷⁰⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0729: Vietnam/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 May 1966), 5-11

they disapproved of the President's policy, 17 percent believed the United States should be "more aggressive" and "go all out" in Vietnam. Another six percent said that America should "either go all out or get out." Another two percent were more specific saying that "more men and material [were] needed." None of those who disapproved of the President's policy echoed arguments made by Congressional or activist dissenters. Thus, at least 51 percent of Americans either agreed with the President's course or believed the United States should be even more aggressive.⁷⁰⁹ The President and the administration still had done nothing to address the concerns of those "Hawks" who wanted more aggressive action by explaining why it could not escalate the war further in Vietnam.

Instead, the administration's response to this crisis of confidence in the President's policies in Vietnam was to assert once more that containment of Communism justified U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The administration launched a full-scale offensive beginning with a speech by Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the Council on Foreign Relations in late May 1966.⁷¹⁰ President Johnson made an even more impassioned defense of his policies in Vietnam at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier during a televised speech at a Memorial Day observance. Johnson recalled the names of soldiers killed in Greece, Berlin, Korea, the Taiwan Straits, Cuba, and Vietnam "in the resistance to aggression" and "the peace-building efforts that America has made since 1945." Through World War II, Johnson added, "We have learned that the time to

⁷⁰⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0729: Vietnam/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 May 1966), 5-11

⁷¹⁰ Dean Rusk, "Address by Secretary Rusk Before the Council on Foreign Relations at new York, New York on May 24, 1966, 'Organizing the Peace for Man's Survival'; Department of State Bulletin, June 13, 1966, p. 926," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-81-83, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

stop aggression is when it first begins. And that is one reason that we are in South Vietnam today.” Johnson understood that Americans were confused by the conflict in South Vietnam because it did not take the form of “organized divisions marching brazenly and openly across frontiers,” consisting instead of infiltration and “well-organized assassination, kidnapping, [and] intimidation of civilians in remote villages.” Yet, Johnson insisted, “That kind of aggression is just as real and just as dangerous for the safety and independence of the people of South Vietnam as was the attack on South Korea in June of 1950.” To those who argued that the Vietnam War was a civil war, Johnson insisted that it was “insurgency mounted from outside a nation.” To those who argued that South Vietnam was too unstable, Johnson answered, “Seldom has a people been called upon to build a nation and wage war against externally supported aggression at the same time.” Invoking the ghost of his slain predecessor at this solemn military cemetery, Johnson insisted that his own policy was consistent with that of President Kennedy, who had said just before his death, “We want the war to be won, the Communists to be contained, and the Americans to go home.”⁷¹¹ Hubert Humphrey echoed these same themes in a fiery speech at the commencement of the United States Military Academy at West Point only a week later.⁷¹²

Despite setbacks in Vietnam, the press continued to support the administration’s arguments for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of Communism. Specifically, the media reiterated C.L. Sulzberger’s argument about the positive implications of

⁷¹¹ George Herman, Lyndon B. Johnson, “President Johnson speaks at Arlington Cemetery,” *CBS Special Report*, CBS, black and white with sound, 30 May 1966, Video # MP568, “President Lyndon B. Johnson speaks at Arlington cemetery,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷¹² Hubert Humphrey, “Address by Vice President Humphrey at Commencement Exercises at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York on June 8 1966, ‘Perspective on Asia’; Department of State Bulletin, July 4, 1966, p. 2,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-84-85, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

the domino theory repeatedly in summer 1966. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* made a similar claim the following month. Citing the Indonesian Congress' recent decision to name Lieutenant General Suharto as Communist President Sukarno's successor, the *Globe-Democrat* predicted that "before long Sukarno will be completely divorced from power as Indonesia moves to reestablish its economy and friendly relations with its neighbors." The editorial concluded: "The United States' firm stand against Red aggression in Vietnam should be credited with making the emergence of free Asian nations possible."⁷¹³

Despite concerted campaigning by the administration, reinforced by sympathetic reporting in the press, public approval of the administration's handling of Vietnam continued to slip in June 1966. This deterioration resulted directly from the administration's refusal to address the concerns of "Hawks" who wanted the war escalated further. In mid-June 1966, only 38 percent of Americans approved of the President's handling of Vietnam (a slip of two more percentage points from late May) with 44 percent disapproving (an increase of two percentage points). Americans increasingly disapproved because they wanted to escalate the war. When asked what they wanted the administration to do next, of those who had an opinion, only 12 percent wanted to de-escalate the conflict and only 17 percent wanted complete withdrawal. Nine percent wanted to hold the present course. Nearly two thirds of Americans wanted to escalate the war in some way. Twenty-three percent wanted to escalate bombing but not send more troops. The greatest percentage, 42 percent, wanted to "quickly build up our forces in

⁷¹³ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, "Sukarno—Going, Going, Soon Gone," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 18 July 1966, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Vietnam to as many as one million men and make an all-out effort to defeat North Vietnam.”⁷¹⁴

The administration had still done nothing to explain to the two thirds of Americans who wanted more aggressive action why it wasn't escalating the war in the face of setbacks.

Instead, during a visit to the Omaha, Nebraska Municipal Docks to inspect a barge full of grain bound for India, President Lyndon Johnson once more used the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Johnson said: “The North Vietnamese at this hour are trying to deny the people of South Viet-Nam the right to build their own nation.” Johnson claimed that the United States was in South Vietnam because “South Viet-Nam is important to the security of the rest of...Asia.” Adopting Holt's argument about the possible positive implications of the domino theory, Johnson claimed this was true because “the nations of free Asia” that had once “[lain] under the shadow of Communist China” could now grow socially and economically because they were “shielded by the courage of the South Vietnamese” and because they were “convinced that the Vietnamese people and their allies are going to stand firm against the conqueror, or against aggression.” Johnson explained: “Our fighting in Viet-Nam, therefore, is buying time not only for South Viet Nam, but it is buying time for a new and a vital, growing Asia to emerge and develop additional strength.” Johnson also reiterated the lessons of Munich: “What happens in South Viet-Nam will determine...whether might makes right.” If the United States failed in South Vietnam, Johnson concluded, “It will be an invitation to the would-be conqueror to keep on marching.”⁷¹⁵

⁷¹⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0730: Johnson/1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam/Race Relations/Political Parties* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 June 1966), 10-13.

⁷¹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by President Johnson at Omaha Municipal Dock on June 30, 1966, ‘Two Threats to Peace: Hunger and Aggression’; Department of State Bulletin, July 25, 1966, p. 115,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The

In July 1966, the administration finally responded to those who wanted the war escalated by initiating its first bombing raids on fuel depots in Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam. This action was applauded by most Americans. When asked if they approved of the escalation in bombing, 70 percent of Americans answered with an unqualified “yes.” And, with increased bombing and with political turmoil in South Vietnam receding from the headlines, American public approval of the President’s handling of the war in Vietnam once more turned in favor of the administration. Forty-nine percent now approved of the President’s policies in Vietnam (a jump of eleven points from the previous month) with only 35 percent disapproving (a drop of nine percentage points). But the administration had not completely sated the public’s appetite for escalation. When asked what America should do next in Vietnam, 26 percent of Americans said the United States should continue its present policy. By contrast, 31 percent of Americans still wanted the war escalated in some way. In fact, two percent of Americans wanted the United States to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam.⁷¹⁶

Rusk addressed the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong from the SEATO conference taking place in Australia. His comments were notable as they marked the first time the administration had used the tit-for-tat precedent set by retaliatory air strikes during the Gulf of Tonkin incident as a justification for escalation since the President’s noonday press conference on 28 July 1965, nearly a year earlier. Rusk said that the bombing was executed as a response to escalation by North Vietnam—the widening of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the introduction of new North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. “The pace of escalation was imposed by the other side,”

Johnson Administration, D-85-86, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁷¹⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0731: Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 8-13 July 1966), 5, 7-11.

Rusk added. Rusk also reiterated the President's assurances from a year earlier that the United States was "not asking them [North Vietnam] for an unconditional surrender, an acre of North Vietnamese land, or a change in their regime." Instead, Rusk said, "All we ask is that they stop shooting and coming across the border."⁷¹⁷ The administration seemed strangely apologetic about this escalation, given its popularity with the American public.

Most in the media supported the administration's escalation. The editors of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* responded to the Soviet Union's protests over the peril to its ships in Haiphong by writing, "Mr. Johnson should tell Russia to get its ships out of Haiphong harbor." The editors wanted even further escalation: "To make sure USSR vessels won't be in danger, the President could extend the blockade all up the North Vietnam coast." The editors wrote that "America will not waltz on its Vietnam commitment" but that the United States might lose at the negotiating table if they allowed "Russia or Red China or Hanoi" to "wrest victory from defeat." The *Globe-Democrat* suggested, rather than negotiations, "more vital bombing of enemy supply centers, industry and staging theaters in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia" and a blockade of North Vietnam.⁷¹⁸

While public approval of the President's handling of the war rebounded, dissent in the Senate continued to grow—and this dissent was aimed at the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In June 1966, Senator Milward L. Simpson wrote a letter to Under Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton asking the Department to declassify transcripts of a May 1966 executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in which the subject of the Gulf of Tonkin incident was

⁷¹⁷ Associated Press, "North Viet Nam Does Escalating, Rusk Says," Canberra, Australia, Associated Press, *Toledo Blade*, 30 June 1966, 6.

⁷¹⁸ St. Louis Globe-Democrat, "ANSWER FOR SOVIET PROTEST," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 18 July 1966, 12A, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 3, 1966, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

discussed so that they could be released to the public. In the letter, he wrote: “Serious doubt has been cast upon the credibility of the Administration.” He added: “After reading the transcript of the hearings, that doubt has not been erased.”⁷¹⁹ Not surprisingly, the Department of Defense refused to declassify the transcripts since they would only reinforce (rather than “erase”) doubts about the administration’s account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. In response to Senator Simpson’s letter, Senator Fulbright wrote that, while he had “no evidence regarding the veracity of the Administration” on the matter of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, he did have “some question that the incident was ‘unprovoked.’”⁷²⁰ These questions were probably only aggravated by the fact that the Department of Defense ultimately refused Senator Simpson’s request to release the transcripts of the hearing.⁷²¹ While Simpson would eventually talk to the press about this refusal,⁷²² the matter failed to pique media interest in the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1966. This episode was still significant as it marked the first public questioning of the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident by a member of Congress other than Senator Morse or Senator Gruening.

⁷¹⁹ Milward L. Simpson [US Senator], letter to John T. McNaughton [Assistant Secretary of Defense] requesting release of transcript of hearing on Gulf of Tonkin incident, 14 June 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁷²⁰ J. William Fulbright, letter to Milward L. Simpson [US Senator] about his request to John McNaughton [Assistant Secretary of Defense] for release of transcript of hearing on Gulf of Tonkin incident, 17 June 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁷²¹ John T. McNaughton [Assistant Secretary of Defense], letter to Milward L. Simpson [US Senator] rejecting his request for release of transcript of hearing on Gulf of Tonkin incident, 20 June 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁷²² Milward L. Simpson [US Senator], letter to Senator Fulbright accompanying John T. McNaughton’s [Assistant Secretary of Defense] refusal to release of transcript of hearing on Gulf of Tonkin incident, 29 June 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 2, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Senator J. William Fulbright also persisted in his own dissent against the war. During the debate on the foreign aid bill on the floor of the Senate, Fulbright argued against giving the President more than a one-year authorization because of the administration's "astonishing assertion" that it had committed troops to Vietnam because of the history of commitments to the region, including past foreign aid packages. Fulbright characterized this as a "tendency to escalate our commitments" without Congressional advice and consent.⁷²³

Despite this new Congressional dissent, most Americans still continued to approve of the President's handling of the war by a narrow margin. Moreover, almost a third of those who disapproved of Johnson's policies disapproved because they wanted the war escalated in some way. In fact, when asked explicitly what the United States should do next, only 20 percent of Americans who had an opinion believed the United States should continue the war at its present level. By contrast, 61 percent believed the war should be escalated in some way.⁷²⁴ The bump in approval the President had received by initiating the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong had nearly vanished; the public's appetite for escalation had not been sated and the administration had done nothing to explain why it did not escalate further.

Instead, the administration continued to focus on its justifications for the war based on the ideology of military containment in its counteroffensive against dissenters through late summer 1966. In a speech in August, President Johnson claimed Americans understood that the goal in Vietnam was "that communism must be halted...as it was halted in Western Europe and in Greece and Turkey and Korea and the Caribbean." The President also repeated the possible

⁷²³ United Press International, "Fulbright Attacks LBJ 'Escalation' Of Commitments," United Press International, Washington, DC, *Arkansas Gazette*, 22 July 1966, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁷²⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0733: Politics/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 18-23 August 1966), 15-22.

positive consequences of the domino theory: that the U.S. presence in South Vietnam provided “a shield for those on whom the Communists prey” in order to “give them time to build.” The President concluded that it was important not to “back down on our commitment, if we expect our friends around the world to have faith in our word.”⁷²⁵

By the end of summer 1966, over a year after the President first announced the deployment of large numbers of troops to Vietnam, after dramatic hearings in the chambers of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and an equally dramatic counteroffensive by the administration, pro- and anti-war factions had fought to a stalemate. Americans continued to approve of the President’s handling of Vietnam by a narrow margin (42 percent approval, 38 percent disapproval). And 27 percent of those who disapproved of the President’s handling of Vietnam wanted him to take more forceful action in the conflict.⁷²⁶ When asked by Gallup if they believed “the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam,” 58 percent of those Americans who had an opinion on the question, still said “no.”⁷²⁷ A majority of Americans still believed their country should be fighting the Vietnam War. But they wanted it fought more aggressively. And the administration had not explained to these Americans why it didn’t do so.

⁷²⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by President Johnson before the Navy League at Manchester, N.H., August 20, 1966, ‘Our Objective in Vietnam’; Department of State Bulletin, September 12, 1966, p. 158,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-88-89, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁷²⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0734: Vietnam/Communist China/Civil Rights/Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 8-13 September 1966), 11-15.

⁷²⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0734: Vietnam/Communist China/Civil Rights/Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 8-13 September 1966), 11-15.

Johnson in Asia

In October 1966, on the eve of the 1966 midterm elections, the President made a highly publicized tour of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, culminating in a trip to South Vietnam—his first since 1961 as Vice President. This trip reignited the debate between the administration—using containment to justify the war—and its opponents—attacking the administration’s use of containment to justify the war. In the end, the President had been fighting the wrong battle—the American people handed the Democratic Party a series of defeats, apparently because they wanted more aggressive action in Vietnam. After this defeat, the President for the first time addressed the majority of Americans who wanted him to be more aggressive in prosecuting the war. The President also addressed the new Congress, reminding them of his insurance policy against their dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

The trip and the speeches and events along the way were calibrated to reinforce the domino theory: if South Vietnam fell, all of Southeast Asia would be threatened by Communist expansion. In a visit with New Zealand opposition parliamentarian (and later Prime Minister) Norman Kirk, President Johnson recalled that, when he had last been in New Zealand, 25 years earlier, the country was threatened by a “snowball of aggression” from Japan that the world had failed to stop before it gathered strength. Now, Johnson claimed, the country was threatened by Chinese aggression. The United States was in South Vietnam, he added, to “keep the momentum from gathering” until it swept across Southeast Asia. The President added that South Vietnam was also a test of the United States’ commitment to other allies who rely on its promises for their security.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁸ The White House, “Presidential Diary,” (Washington, DC: The White House, 20 October 1966), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), accessed 9 January 2013, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj_tools/daily_diary/pdf/1966/19661020.pdf.

Another important moment in the President's Asia trip was a conference in Manila on 24 and 25 October 1966 of the leaders of seven Asian and Pacific nations—Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, South Vietnam, and the United States. The text of the Joint Communiqué from this conference was a virtual catalogue of the administration's justifications for U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam based on the containment of Communism. The war in Vietnam was a battle for "the future of Asia and the Pacific" that "bitter past experience" had taught the world must be fought. If North Vietnam was successful, South Vietnam would be "conquered by aggressive force." The United States and its allies had no designs in Communist Asia beyond "peace in South Vietnam and in the rest of Asia and the Pacific." This communiqué also marked the first time the Johnson administration responded to the infrequent attacks on the President's true willingness to negotiate; the communiqué asserted that the allies were "prepared to pursue any avenue which could lead to a secure and just peace, whether through discussion and negotiation or through reciprocal actions by both sides."⁷²⁹

Johnson followed the Manila Conference with a surprise visit to Vietnam where he reinforced the theme that the war in Vietnam was a war against aggression. In a speech at the Saigon airport, President Johnson said the United States was part of an allied effort "standing up to terror." In another speech to troops at Cam Ranh Bay, the President said that the United States was fighting "to show here...in Vietnam that aggression doesn't pay and can't succeed."⁷³⁰

⁷²⁹ White House, "Text of The Joint Communiqué Issued at the Manila Summit Conference , Manila, The Philippines," White House, Washington DC, 25 October 1966, from Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part VI. C.] Settlement of the Conflict. Histories of Contacts. Volume IV—Negotiations, 1967-1968, 70-74, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁷³⁰ CBS, "The President in Asia: Vietnam Visit," (Fifth in a series), *CBS News Special Report*, 27 October 1966, Video #MP582, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

The President's trip to Asia and the South Pacific generated a number of news stories in the media that supported the administration's arguments for intervention in Vietnam based on the containment of Communism.

CBS' special coverage of the President's Asian tour generally supported the administration's use of the containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The report ran excerpts of an interview with Dean Rusk while providing no criticism of the Secretary's claim that the fate of peace in Vietnam rested in the hands of "Hanoi and Peking." Likewise, a voiceover of footage of South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Tran Van Do arriving in Manila for the conference uncritically reported that both South Vietnam and South Korea would "argue against any concessions to the Viet Cong."⁷³¹

Even the coverage of the President's encounter with antiwar protesters in Australia was generally supportive. The report showed footage of protesters lining the President's motorcade route in Sydney's Hyde Park. One protester stood with a sign that read "I'm American. I represent (excluding the South) most Americans who are opposed to our Vietnam war." The footage also showed protesters storming the motorcade route and laying down in front of the President's vehicle, images that must have reminded viewers of protesters attacking Vice President Nixon's motorcade in Venezuela almost a decade earlier. However, the voiceover of the footage referred to protesters as "Vietniks" and claimed that "the anti-Vietnam demonstrators, both numerically and politically, are a tiny fraction in Australian life."⁷³²

⁷³¹ Charles Collingwood, David Schoumacher, Eric Sevareid, "The President In Asia: Eve of Manila Conference," *CBS News Special Report*, CBS, 23 October 1966, Video #MP580, "The President in Asia: The eve of the Manila conference," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷³² Charles Collingwood, David Schoumacher, Eric Sevareid, "The President In Asia: Eve of Manila Conference," *CBS News Special Report*, CBS, 23 October 1966, Video #MP580, "The President in Asia: The eve of the Manila conference," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

However, this CBS report concluded with commentary by Eric Sevareid, who clearly opposed the administration's policies in Vietnam. Sevareid did concede that "Hanoi and Peking" held the key to peace in South Vietnam, supporting the administration's argument that the war was a result of their aggression. Like Senator Morse, he predicted that, if the Asia trip did not start negotiations, "then that tragic war is bound to be intensified and escalated still further." However, Sevareid said that, with escalation, "the danger [would be] increased of big power involvement and a spreading catastrophe."⁷³³ He added:

Asian Lilliputians in Vietnam have tied down Gulliver [the United States] with a thousand tiny threads. He heaves and struggles and smashes back with his one free fist, his bombing power. He makes threats, offers deals, promises to turn their land into a garden with his skills and his money, if they will sheathe their tiny arrows and let him up.⁷³⁴

Sevareid concluded by attacking the domino theory. If Rusk's "far-reaching rhetoric about Vietnam" was correct, all of the free nations of Asia would be helping the United States in Vietnam. However, he concluded, "they do not believe in this apocalyptic hypothesis [the domino theory] in the first place."⁷³⁵

If the President's intention in his trip to Asia was to generate public approval for his handling of the war, then the effort was inconsequential; the trip did little to alter his public support. After the President's trip, a Gallup poll revealed that 43 percent of Americans approved

⁷³³ CBS, "The President in Asia: Vietnam Visit," (Fifth in a series), *CBS News Special Report*, 27 October 1966, Video #MP582, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷³⁴ CBS, "The President in Asia: Vietnam Visit," (Fifth in a series), *CBS News Special Report*, 27 October 1966, Video #MP582, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁷³⁵ CBS, "The President in Asia: Vietnam Visit," (Fifth in a series), *CBS News Special Report*, 27 October 1966, Video #MP582, Audiovisual Materials, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

of the President's handling of Vietnam, a bump of only one percentage point from September. Disapproval of his handling of the war fell by the same margin to 40 percent.⁷³⁶

If the President's intention in his trip to Asia was to aid his party in the 1966 midterm elections, then the trip must be judged a failure. As the polls closed on 8 November 1966, the Democratic Party had lost 47 Democratic Congressmen and two Democratic Senators.⁷³⁷ But there is no indication that this vote against the President's party was a vote against the Vietnam War. Even after this disappointing election, when asked by Gallup if they believed "the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam," 63 percent of those Americans who expressed an opinion still said "no."⁷³⁸ To the extent that the election was a referendum on the war at all, it was probably a vote for more forceful action in Vietnam—a Republican position.

In the aftermath of the President's trip to Asia and the midterm elections, the administration returned to its arsenal of arguments based on the ideology of containment to justify U.S. military intervention. The President reminded Americans of the lessons of Munich in his 1967 State of the Union Address in January. But he did so on this occasion not by warning of the dangers of inaction but by touting the benefits of action. The United States had "stood in Western Europe 20 years ago" and "the course of freedom was...changed for the better because of the courage of that stand." The United States had "stopped another kind of aggression...in Korea" four years later. "Imagine how different Asia might be today," Johnson told the Congress and the American people, "if we had failed to act when the Communist army of North Korea

⁷³⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0737: Vietnam/Elections* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-15 November 1966), 5.

⁷³⁷ Michael J. Towle, *Out of Touch: The Presidency and Public Opinion*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2004), 103.

⁷³⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0737: Vietnam/Elections* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-15 November 1966), 12-16.

marched south.” Johnson promised similar results in the present war. The President also once more touted the positive implications of the domino theory. Johnson claimed: “The performance of our men in Vietnam—backed by the American people—has created a feeling of confidence and unity among the independent nations of Asia and the Pacific.” Recalling his recent trip to Asia, Johnson added: “Fear of external Communist conquest in many Asian nations is already subsiding—and with this, the spirit of hope is rising.” Johnson also revived the argument that the United States had to hold out in Vietnam until China matured and that United States could “welcome a China which [has] decided to respect her neighbors’ rights” into the world community.⁷³⁹

However, it is also seems clear that the President believed the midterm elections had been a vote for more forceful action in Vietnam. In his 1967 State of the Union Address, the President finally, for the first time, answered the majority of Americans who wanted him to be more aggressive in prosecuting the war:

Whether we can fight a war of limited objectives over a period of time, and keep alive the hope of independence and stability for people other than ourselves; whether we can continue to act with restraint when the temptation to “get it over with” is inviting but dangerous...whether we can do these without arousing the hatreds and the passions that are ordinarily loosed in time of war—on all these questions so much turns.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 10, 1967,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967*. Volume I, entry 3 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 2-14, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1967/01-10-1967.html>.

⁷⁴⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 10, 1967,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967*. Volume I, entry 3 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 2-14, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1967/01-10-1967.html>.

What the President failed to do was to explain to the American people why it was dangerous to arouse these “hatreds and passions.” This was a statement of intent not to escalate without a statement of explanation as to why he would not escalate. Thus it did nothing to persuade the “Hawks,” those Americans who wanted more aggressive action in Vietnam.

The President also took the opportunity of the State of the Union Address to remind the new Congress of his insurance policy against their dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In answering his own question, “Why are we in Vietnam?” the President cited the SEATO treaty, North Vietnamese aggression, the threat Asian Communism presented to all of Southeast Asia, and the right of the South Vietnamese people to self-determination. But Johnson also said: “We are there because the Congress has pledged by solemn vote to take all necessary measures to prevent further aggression.”⁷⁴¹ While he did not name this Congressional resolution, the President made it clear that he meant the Tonkin Gulf Resolution by recalling its exact language: “take all necessary measures...to prevent further aggression.”⁷⁴²

Bombing, Negotiations, and Credibility

Beginning in late 1966, a new line of attack against the administration’s policies in Vietnam began to take shape. While most opponents continued to attack the administration’s use of containment to justify the war, a few began to attack the administration’s credibility.

⁷⁴¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The State of the Union Address of President Johnson to the Congress (Excerpts), January 10, 1967; Department of State Bulletin, January 30, 1967, p. 158,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-98-99, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁷⁴² Congress of the United States, “Text of Joint Resolution, August 7, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-16-17, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Opponents first attacked the administration's credibility on civilian casualties incurred by bombing Hanoi. Next they attacked the credibility of the President's claims that he wanted negotiations to end the war. The administration's response to both of these attacks was disjointed and ineffective; in the end it was the media, rather than the administration, that defeated them—by painting these critics as aiding Communists. These attacks generated significant new Congressional dissent and were particularly effective because they reinforced sentiments already held by most Americans that the administration was lying to them about the war. The devastating effectiveness of these attacks on the administration's credibility also presaged the final collapse of Johnson's credibility that would occur in 1968.

The next challenge to the administration's policies in Vietnam was an attack on the President's credibility about the bombing of North Vietnam. After the North Vietnamese granted the *New York Times*'s Harrison Salisbury a visa, he went to North Vietnam and wrote a series of damaging stories in late 1966 that contradicted the administration's assertions about the surgical nature of bombing in the north.⁷⁴³ Salisbury's first dispatch from Hanoi—published in the *New York Times* on Christmas Day 1966—was about a residential area of Hanoi destroyed by bombing. "Christmas Eve found residents in several parts of Hanoi still picking over the wreckage of homes said to have been damaged in the United States raids of Dec. 13 and 14," Salisbury wrote.⁷⁴⁴ The heart of Salisbury's critique was that these attacks showed dishonesty in the administration:

United States officials have contended that no attacks in built-up or residential Hanoi

⁷⁴³ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 433-435; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 503-504.

⁷⁴⁴ Harrison E Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, A VISITOR TO HANOI INSPECTS DAMAGE LAID TO U.S. RAIDS: A Purposeful ..., *New York Times* 25 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

have been authorized or carried out. They have also suggested that Hanoi residential damage in the two raids could have been caused by defensive surface to air missiles that misfired or fell short.⁷⁴⁵

An inset from the *Times* did add: “The State Department said Thursday that ‘the possibility of an accident’ could not be ruled out.”⁷⁴⁶ But the article then continued with Salisbury writing:

This correspondent is no ballistics specialist, but inspection of several damaged sites and talks with witnesses make it clear that Hanoi residents certainly believed they were bombed by United States planes, that they certainly observed United States planes overhead and that damage certainly occurred right in the center of town.⁷⁴⁷

Salisbury also reported “considerable civilian casualties” as a result of the bombing.⁷⁴⁸ A summary of this article written by the Associated Press was published in many newspapers across the country the day after Christmas.⁷⁴⁹

The following day, another article by Harrison Salisbury claimed that the town of Namdinh had been reduced to rubble and most of its 90,000 residents had fled the bombing. Salisbury claimed that 89 civilians had been killed and 405 wounded and “13 per cent of the city’s housing, including the homes of 12,464 people, have been destroyed.” This despite,

⁷⁴⁵ Harrison E Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, A VISITOR TO HANOI INSPECTS DAMAGE LAID TO U.S. RAIDS: A Purposeful ...,” *New York Times* 25 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁴⁶ Harrison E Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, A VISITOR TO HANOI INSPECTS DAMAGE LAID TO U.S. RAIDS: A Purposeful ...,” *New York Times* 25 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁴⁷ Harrison E Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, A VISITOR TO HANOI INSPECTS DAMAGE LAID TO U.S. RAIDS: A Purposeful ...,” *New York Times* 25 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁴⁸ Harrison E Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, A VISITOR TO HANOI INSPECTS DAMAGE LAID TO U.S. RAIDS: A Purposeful ...,” *New York Times* 25 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁴⁹ Associated Press, “‘Considerable Civilian Casualties’ Heavy Damage Caused By Bombings On Hanoi,” Associated Press, New York, *Gasden Times*, Gasden, Alabama, 26 December 1966, 1.

Salisbury wrote, the fact that “no American communiqué has asserted that Namdinh contains some facility that the United States regards as a military objective.” In a vain attempt to destroy a textile factory, Salisbury wrote, “Forty-nine people were killed, 135 were wounded on Hang Thao [street] and 240 houses collapsed.” This was accomplished, Salisbury added, by “eight bombs—MK-84’s...huge weapons weighing about 2,000 pounds.” Salisbury repeatedly referred to this attack as an “unannounced assault.” Salisbury added, “United States planes are dropping an enormous weight of explosives on purely civilian targets.”⁷⁵⁰ This contradicted, Salisbury wrote, the President’s assurances two and a half years earlier:

President Johnson’s announced policy that American targets in North Vietnam are steel and concrete rather than human lives seems to have little connection with the reality of attacks carried out by United States Planes.⁷⁵¹

Salisbury concluded by claiming that the bombing had little impact on North Vietnam’s military capacity since bomb damage is easily repaired. The bombing, Salisbury wrote, “is hardly felt” by the North Vietnamese military.⁷⁵² As with the previous dispatch by Salisbury, a summary of this dispatch was filed by the Associated Press and ran in newspapers across the country.⁷⁵³

⁷⁵⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, “U.S. Raids Batter 2 Towns; Supply Route Is Little Hurt: U.S. Raids in ...,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁵¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, “U.S. Raids Batter 2 Towns; Supply Route Is Little Hurt: U.S. Raids in ...,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁵² Harrison E. Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, “U.S. Raids Batter 2 Towns; Supply Route Is Little Hurt: U.S. Raids in ...,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁵³ Associated Press, “‘Hanoi Towns Devastated’ Civilian Bombings Described,” Associated Press, New York, *Miami News*, Miami, FL, 27 December 1966, 1.

The same day, the administration was forced to acknowledge that civilian casualties occurred while bombing North Vietnam. While the Pentagon added in its statement, “all possible care is taken to avoid civilian casualties,” it also added “it is impossible to avoid all damage to civilian areas.” Writer Neil Sheehan noted, “A number of...small [oil] dumps, both within and on the outskirts of Namdinh, have repeatedly been struck.” Implicating President Johnson directly for these attacks on civilians, Sheehan wrote: “Where important and sensitive targets are concerned, such as the oil depots near Hanoi and Haiphong, the White House itself must give the authorization.”⁷⁵⁴

These stories succeeded in creating new Congressional dissent. Republican Congressman Ogden R. Reid of New York requested hearings and demanded to see aerial photography of the bombing in North Vietnam to confirm Salisbury’s claims. Reid added that his call for hearings was in direct response to the contrast between the dispatches by Salisbury and the administration’s claims that it was attacking only military targets. Democratic Congressman John E. Moss of California, chairman of the Government Information Subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations, also indicated he would call hearings on the controversy. Democratic Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin said that the dispatches were “a very serious statement by a highly respected reporter” and warranted investigation.⁷⁵⁵ Senator J. William Fulbright promised hearings with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and

⁷⁵⁴ Neil Sheehan, Special to *The New York Times*, “Washington Concedes Bombs Hit Civilian Areas in North Vietnam: CIVILIANS’ AREAS HIT, U.S. ADMITS,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁵⁵ E.W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “Eisenhower Says U.S. Aims Only at Military Targets: EISENHOWER CALLS TARGETS MILITARY,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk about the civilian casualties.⁷⁵⁶ Senator Karl E. Mundt, a South Dakota Republican and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he believed Secretaries Rusk and McNamara would also be questioned on “the effectiveness of the bombing” when hearings resumed in 1967.⁷⁵⁷

Not every member of Congress was sympathetic to Salisbury or his claims. Republican Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper of Iowa said: “It is strange to me that they [North Vietnam] will let a *New York Times* reporter in but not objective reporters.”⁷⁵⁸

On 29 December 1966, the White House began a disjointed and largely ineffective counteroffensive against Salisbury’s charges. The acting White House press secretary, George Christian, addressed Salisbury’s charge that the President had approved bombing of civilian areas in Hanoi. Christian insisted: “No civilian targets have ever been authorized.” One incredulous reporter pressed as to whether the President believed that the military had disobeyed his orders by attacking civilians in Hanoi. Christian could only respond, “No.”⁷⁵⁹

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Arthur Sylvester was even less effective in disputing Salisbury’s claims. He tried to put the 89 civilian deaths in perspective by noting that these deaths had occurred in 64 separate raids. To Sylvester, this number showed “rather

⁷⁵⁶ Associated Press, “U.S. Intends to Continue Bombing Enemy Targets,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Nashua Telegraph*, Nashua, NH, 28 December 1966, 30.

⁷⁵⁷ E.W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “Eisenhower Says U.S. Aims Only at Military Targets: EISENHOWER CALLS TARGETS MILITARY,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁵⁸ E.W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “Eisenhower Says U.S. Aims Only at Military Targets: EISENHOWER CALLS TARGETS MILITARY,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁵⁹ *New York Times*, “TARGETS MILITARY, JOHNSON BELIEVES: He Is Satisfied That Orders ...,” *New York Times* (1923-Current file), 29 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

precise, careful bombing,” since this death toll averaged to only “one and a half persons a raid.” But Sylvester was immediately forced to backtrack when he was asked whether this meant the Department of Defense accepted the figure of 89 civilian deaths as accurate. He could only answer: “I don’t know if 8 or 89 people have been killed there.” Nor would Sylvester say whether photographs of bomb damage of the type Congressman Reid had demanded actually existed or, if they did, whether they confirmed or disproved Salisbury’s claims. *New York Times* reporter Neil Sheehan was incredulous at this refusal, writing, “It is known that the Pentagon is in possession of aerial photographs showing damage to civilian areas in Namdinh.”⁷⁶⁰ Sheehan concluded of this discussion:

Although he repeatedly declined to say whether the Defense Department’s evidence confirmed or denied Mr. Salisbury’s reports, Mr. Sylvester criticized his dispatches for alleged “misstatements of fact.”⁷⁶¹

The most effective government response to the crisis came from Cmdr. Robert C. Mandeville, recently returned from Vietnam where he had been the commander of a squadron of Navy Intruder bombers. Mandeville called Salisbury’s story “unbelievable” and disputed his claim that 2,000 pound bombs were used against Hanoi. He also said that Salisbury’s textile factory had never been a target. In fact, he disputed that Namdinh as a whole was even a target, saying, “Nobody wanted to go into that place, it was ringed with fire.” Mandeville concluded: “I have never known of a target being assigned in North Vietnam that wasn’t of tactical military

⁷⁶⁰ Neil Sheehan, Special to *The New York Times*, “RAIDS' PRECISION SEEN IN REPORTS: Pentagon Says Hanoi's Data Indicate Low Toll Rate,” *New York Times*, 30 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

⁷⁶¹ Neil Sheehan, Special to *The New York Times*, “RAIDS' PRECISION SEEN IN REPORTS: Pentagon Says Hanoi's Data Indicate Low Toll Rate,” *New York Times*, 30 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

value.”⁷⁶² There is no direct evidence that this statement was prompted by the Pentagon or the White House, but it certainly helped their case more than any statements by the administration.

Supporters of the administration in the press attacked Salisbury’s dispatches by claiming they propagated Communist propaganda. On 30 December 1966, Hanson W. Baldwin, military editor for the *New York Times*, wrote an article in defense of the administration that was published in newspapers across the country through the *New York Times* News Service. The story cited Admiral David L. McDonald, Chief of Naval Operations, and other military and civilian leaders touting the effectiveness of bombing. McDonald was quoted as saying that the bombing had “saved the lives of a lot of soldiers and Marines on the ground in South Vietnam.” The article did note that Pentagon sources privately admitted that civilians had been killed, but Baldwin added, conflating Salisbury’s reports with those of North Vietnamese propagandists, “they [Pentagon sources] said that North Vietnam’s estimates of the number of civilian casualties suffered in the bombing raids, as reported in dispatches...by Harrison E. Salisbury...appear to be ‘grossly exaggerated.’” Baldwin also included a passage written by British journalist Norman Barrymaine who, after visiting North Vietnam, noted severe damage to the North Vietnamese transport system, damage Salisbury denied had occurred. Barrymaine added that the bombing had not crippled North Vietnam “because of the enormous material aid being poured through the port of Haiphong from Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Albania and Red China.”⁷⁶³

⁷⁶² New York Times, “A FLIER DISPUTES REPORT ON RAIDS: Navy Man Calls Dispatch on Namdinh Unbelievable,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

⁷⁶³ Hanson W. Baldwin, “Pentagon Says Raids on North Vietnam Cut U.S. Casualties,” *New York Times* News Service, New York, Nashua Telegraph, Nashua, NH, 30 December 1966, 1.

But even sympathetic reporter Hanson Baldwin was frustrated by the administration's self-inflicted credibility problems. He concluded:

Distorted, confusing or contradictory statements in Washington, inflated claims and undue secrecy in the Pentagon have aided the enemy's propaganda. Many officers in Washington, in Hawaii and in Saigon have advocated policies of greater frankness and some urged the issuance months ago of public explanations about civilian casualties and residential damage caused by U.S. bombing. But they were overruled.⁷⁶⁴

United Press International also implied that Salisbury's work was Communist propaganda. In a 30 December article, the news service noted that "the Soviet Communist party newspaper Pravda printed excerpts today from a series of New York Times dispatches." The article added sardonically that "Pravda made no editorial comment in a brief forward" to Salisbury's dispatches.⁷⁶⁵

On 31 December 1966, evidence emerged that critics alleged proved Salisbury had propagated Communist propaganda. A *Washington Post* article revealed that the figures Salisbury had cited in his dispatches were identical to those published in a Communist propaganda pamphlet published by the North Vietnamese and distributed to foreign correspondents in Moscow in November 1966. Even more damning, the pamphlet was titled "Report on United States War Crimes in Nam-Dinh City." Assistant Secretary of Defense Sylvester, initially rocked by the bombing controversy, was quick to tell reporters that he found

⁷⁶⁴ Hanson W. Baldwin, "Pentagon Says Raids on North Vietnam Cut U.S. Casualties," *New York Times* News Service, New York, Nashua Telegraph, Nashua, NH, 30 December 1966, 1.

⁷⁶⁵ United Press International, "Pravda Cites Hanoi Dispatches," United Press International, Moscow, *New York Times*, 30 December 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 5.

the coincidence of these matching figures “very interesting.”⁷⁶⁶ Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Phil G. Goulding said: “The *New York Times* simply did not take the time to research the matter themselves—or, indeed, to ask our assistance.”⁷⁶⁷ *New York Times* editors provided a tepid response, claiming that the similarity in the figures was “not surprising” since Salisbury had already written that the casualty figures came from the North Vietnamese.⁷⁶⁸ But the damage was already done.⁷⁶⁹ Harrison Salisbury had been dismissed by the media much as radical protesters from the 1965 march on Washington had been dismissed—by accusations that he was aiding the Communists. The bombing controversy quickly faded from the headlines.

No sooner had the crisis of credibility surrounding bombing abated than Salisbury initiated a new crisis of credibility for the administration. This crisis began when North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, in an interview with Salisbury, seemed to indicate a softening of his position on negotiations. In the past, Hanoi had insisted on four preconditions for negotiations: withdrawal of U.S. forces, adherence to the Geneva agreement until reunification was complete, National Liberation Front participation in South Vietnam’s government, and eventual reunification of Vietnam. In his interview, Dong indicated that these four points were not “conditions” for peace talks, but “valid conclusions for discussions.”⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁶ New York Times, “Hanoi Dispatches to Times Criticized,” Washington, D.C., *New York Times*, 1 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 3.

⁷⁶⁷ Harrison E. Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, “Hanoi Premier Tells View; Some in U.S. Detect a Shift: Pham Van Dong ...,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁶⁸ New York Times, “Hanoi Dispatches to Times Criticized,” Washington, D.C., *New York Times*, 1 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 3.

⁷⁶⁹ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 436.

⁷⁷⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury, Special to *The New York Times*, “Hanoi Premier Tells View; Some in U.S. Detect a Shift: Pham Van Dong ...,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

The *New York Times* editorial page fired another volley the following day, claiming that the administration was disingenuous in its claims that it desired negotiations. The occasion was Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant's claim in a 30 December 1966 letter to Ambassador Goldberg that cessation of the bombing of the north was a prerequisite to peace. A 5 January 1967 *Times* editorial noted that the Johnson administration agreed that this was the necessary "first step toward peace" but that the administration refused to take this step until it got a guarantee of a "reciprocal response" from Hanoi. "This reply," the editors of the *Times* wrote, "clearly shunts aside Mr. Thant's initial proposal in the mediation mission the United States itself asked the Secretary General to undertake." Quoting the administration's request to U Thant for mediation, the editors added that the President had promised to "cooperate fully with [U Thant] in getting such discussions started promptly." The editors added: "It is a promise...that now is brought into doubt."⁷⁷¹ The core of this critique was that the President was dishonest when he pledged that he would negotiate without preconditions.

Around the same time, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches issued a statement of its position on the Vietnam War to its member churches that included a stark indictment of the credibility and "the candor of the U.S. Government and its public officials with the public concerning major aspects of the war." According to the Council, "Conflicting policy statements" had created "...a continuing crisis of credibility." Among its complaints, the Council asked for more candor from the administration on "[t]he efforts of the Government to negotiate and the replies to them ...; the willingness of the Government to negotiate with the National Liberation Front...; willingness to arrange for a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces under

⁷⁷¹ New York Times, "Obstacle to Peace Talks," *New York Times*, 5 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 36.

international supervision.”⁷⁷² The Council believed the administration was being dishonest about its willingness to negotiate to end the conflict.

The administration was equally ineffective in dealing with this new challenge to its credibility. It dismissed the seeming change of tone from Hanoi, with one unnamed administration official saying that it was “a distinction without a difference,” a change of phrase but not substance. Dean Rusk still promised, “We stand ready—now and at any time in the future—to sit down with representatives of Hanoi.”⁷⁷³ This tepid response did nothing to defuse the crisis.

Arthur Sylvester, recently resigned as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs after his disastrous handling of the bombing credibility crisis, responded to these new accusations by again attacking Harrison Salisbury. In a speech to the Chicago Headline Club in mid-January, he called Salisbury a “Hanoi-picked correspondent” and said he was “appalled when the *Times* published propaganda statistics concerning alleged civilian casualties on its front page, without attribution of any kind.”⁷⁷⁴ This outburst also did little to defuse the crisis of credibility over negotiations.

The subject of Presidential credibility in seeking a negotiated settlement gained traction and became a heated topic of debate in the media. On 11 February, David Susskind launched a

⁷⁷² General Assembly of the National Council of Churches, “Text of Appeal by National Council to Its Member Churches on the Vietnam War,” *New York Times*, 10 December 1966, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁷⁷³ Hedrick Smith, Special to *The New York Times*, “U.S. Doubts Hanoi Has Given a Sign It Wants Parley,” *New York Times*, 7 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁷⁴ *New York Times*, “Sylvester Critical of Times Article,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

televised assault on Presidential credibility on his talk show.⁷⁷⁵ In a political cartoon a few days earlier, Don Hesse indirectly attacked those dissenters who accused the President of deception in claiming that he sought peace while continuing to intensify the war. The cartoon depicted Ho Chi Minh thumbing his nose, with what appeared to be a bespectacled, bow-tied academic pointing at him. Above this academic was the label “‘Peace at Any Price’ Group.” The caption read “See—He’s Making Peace Gestures.”⁷⁷⁶ The implication was that academic and other dissenters were themselves deceptive in suggesting that North Vietnam was giving genuine signals that it desired peace.

These crises of credibility did have an effect on public support for the President’s policies in Vietnam. By mid-January 1967 Americans had once more begun to disapprove of the President’s handling of Vietnam, with 43 percent disapproving of his handling of the conflict and only 38 percent approving.⁷⁷⁷ Two weeks later, disapproval of the President’s handling of the conflict had risen to 44 percent, though when Americans were asked “Do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam,” 62 percent of those who expressed an opinion still said “no.”⁷⁷⁸ Still, the President and the administration were more in tune with the American people on the issue of negotiations. When Americans were specifically asked about U

⁷⁷⁵ The White House, “Presidential Diary,” (Washington, DC: The White House, 11 February 1967), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), accessed 9 January 2013, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj_tools/daily_diary/pdf/1967/19670211.pdf.

⁷⁷⁶ Don Hesse, “‘See—He’s Making Peace Gestures,’” McNaught Syndicate, *Springdale News*, Springdale, AR, 7 February 1967, 2, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁷⁷⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0739: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 January 1967), 5-6, 8.

⁷⁷⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0740: 1968 Presidential Election/Powell/Income Taxes* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 26-31 January 1967), 5-8, 13.

Thant's peace proposal, including a unilateral cessation of the bombing, Americans who expressed an opinion narrowly rejected it.⁷⁷⁹

A few days after the 1967 State of the Union Address, U.N. Secretary General U Thant entered the fray directly, contesting the administration's contention that South Vietnam was "strategically vital to Western interests and Western security."⁷⁸⁰ Thant also argued that "there will be no move toward peace so long as the bombing of North Vietnam is going on." Finally, Thant disagreed with the administration's contention that the war prosecuted by the Viet Cong was directed from North Vietnam.⁷⁸¹ If Thant's aim was to force the administration into negotiations or a bombing halt, this statement was counterproductive; by questioning the administration's use of containment to justify the war rather than its questioning its credibility on negotiations, U Thant inadvertently changed the topic to the administration's strong suit.

On 12 January 1967, Secretary Rusk was able to defend the administration's justifications for the war rather than its credibility on negotiations on the *Today* show with interviewer Joseph C. Harsch. Harsch asked the Secretary to respond to UN Secretary General U Thant's charge, that he did not believe "that South Viet-Nam is strategically vital to Western interests and Western security." Rusk returned to the lessons of Munich. "If the momentum of aggression should begin to roll in that part of the world," Rusk insisted, "...then that seems to put us back on the trail that led us into World War II." Adding a warning about nuclear war,

⁷⁷⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0739: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 January 1967), 5-6, 8.

⁷⁸⁰ Drew Middleton, "Thant Is Disputed By 7 Asian Envoys On His View of War, United Nations, New York, *New York Times* (1923-Current file), 14 January 1967, 1, 8; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

⁷⁸¹ Drew Middleton, "Thant Disagrees With U.S. On War: Disputes Strategic Value of Vietnam to Weest—Says Domino Theory Is Invalid," *New York Times*, 11 January 1967, 1, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Rusk said: “We've got to hang on to those lessons, because if they lead us into world war III, there won't be much left from which we can draw lessons and start over again.”⁷⁸²

The media also largely rejected U Thant’s objections to U.S. policy. His comments prompted the *New York Times* to report that ambassadors from seven Asian nations disputed the Secretary General’s assessment. Implicitly proving the domino theory, the *Times* reported that these ambassadors met with Thant and told him that “they considered Vietnam important to their security and that of Southeast Asia and adjacent lands.” Even after this meeting, according to the article, U Thant “again rejected the domino theory.” The article concluded by noting that the Asian ambassadors also disputed U Thant’s comparison of South Vietnam to Yugoslavia in making the case for neutralization of Vietnam because Yugoslavia did not border the Soviet Union, as Vietnam did China.⁷⁸³

Just as with radical protesters and Harrison Salisbury, the media painted U Thant as complicit with Communists. The Associated Press reported that Soviet Communist Party Leader Leonid Brezhnev agreed with Secretary General U Thant. According to the AP, Brezhnev agreed with U Thant that “the United States bombing raids on targets in Hanoi had raised ‘new obstacles’ to a settlement of the Vietnam War.” He also echoed the argument of those dissenters who claimed the administration was deceptive in claiming it sought peace. Brezhnev, the article claimed, expressed “skepticism of statements by the United States officials that they wished to

⁷⁸² Dean Rusk, “Secretary Rusk Interview on ‘Today’ Program, January 12, 1967, With Hugh Downs from new York and Joseph C. Harsch in Washington; Department of State Bulletin, January 30, 1967, p. 168,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D-- The Johnson Administration, D-99-101, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁷⁸³ Drew Middleton, “Thant Is Disputed By 7 Asian Envoys On His View of War, United Nations, New York, *New York Times* (1923-Current file), 14 January 1967, 1, 8; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

end the war by negotiations.” The AP quoted Brezhnev: “Who will believe the calls for peace if these calls are accompanied by provocative actions...?”⁷⁸⁴ Just as with the protesters from the 1965 march on Washington and critics of the administration’s credibility concerning bombing, critics of the administration’s true willingness to negotiate now were being attacked as complicit with Communists.

U Thant had also inadvertently changed the topic of conversation from the administration’s credibility to the virtues of a bombing halt, a prospect that the American public strongly rejected. When asked in February 1967, 73 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion said that the United States should “continue the bombing of North Vietnam.” The majority of Americans also rejected U Thant’s argument that continued bombing of the north made the prospects of negotiations more distant; 73 percent of Americans who had an opinion said that continued bombing would “help” rather than “hurt the chances for a settlement of the Vietnam War.”⁷⁸⁵

Still these attacks on the administration’s credibility continued to erode approval of the President’s policies in Vietnam. By February 1967, a plurality of Americans disapproved of the President’s handling of the conflict. However, this did not correspond to an erosion of support for the war; 61 percent of Americans who had an opinion continued to answer that “the U.S. did the right thing in sending troops to Vietnam to try to prevent Communist expansion.”⁷⁸⁶

These specific attacks on the President’s credibility had also succeeded in creating a general perception among the American people that the administration was lying to them about

⁷⁸⁴ New York Times, “Brezhnev Decries Bombing,” Moscow, *New York Times*, 14 January 1967, 8.

⁷⁸⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0741: 1968 Presidential Election/US-China Relations* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 February 1967), 5, 9-11.

⁷⁸⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0741: 1968 Presidential Election/US-China Relations* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 February 1967), 5, 9-11.

Vietnam. Opponents of the war in the media echoed this perception. Art Buchwald wrote an article providing recommendations for hawks and doves on how to argue over the war featuring an interview with the fictitious Professor Heinrich Applebaum, author of the book *How to Fight the Vietnam War in the Living Room*. Applebaum suggested a number of experts that each side in the debate should quote in arguing for or against the war. But his real target was the administration's credibility. Buchwald asked: "Don't you quote President Johnson, Secretary Dean Rusk or Robert McNamara?" Applebaum responded: "It's hardly worth it. Neither the hawks nor the doves believe anything the people in our government tell them."⁷⁸⁷

This humorous aside reflected real national sentiment about the President's credibility in March 1967. The controversy surrounding Johnson's credibility concerning bombing and negotiations had had an impact on public opinion. Gallup asked a cross-section of Americans, "Do you think the Johnson Administration is or is not telling the public all they should know about the Vietnam War?" Fully 65 percent responded that the administration "is not telling the truth," with 23 percent believing the administration was truthful and 11 percent not sure.⁷⁸⁸ This was a dramatic reversal from early 1965, when Americans implicitly trusted their government and said that the administration knew better than the public when it came to U.S. policy in Vietnam. And the administration had done nothing to address questions about its credibility.

The Spring Mobilization

Spring 1967 brought an even more dramatic wave of radical protests against the war. Radical protesters continued to attack not just the application of containment to the Vietnam

⁷⁸⁷ Art Buchwald, "War of Words Over Vietnam," Washington, DC, *Washington Post, Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 March 1967, 8.

⁷⁸⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0742: Vietnam War/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 9-14 March 1967), 9.

War, but the ideology of military containment of Communism itself. Like earlier radical protests, the public and the press roundly rejected these protesters, with many accusing them of prolonging the war or aiding Communists. Former Vice President and 1968 Presidential contender Richard Nixon also took the opportunity of these protests to conflate radical protesters with Congressional opponents of the war. In fact, there is evidence that these protests actually bolstered public support for the administration and its policies in Vietnam.

While dissenters in the media increasingly focused on the President's credibility, the target of radical dissenters remained the Cold War framework for foreign and domestic policy. As 1967 began, this critique had crystalized into an attack on American imperialism. This imperialism was seen as an opportunity by many radicals.⁷⁸⁹ National Secretary of the Students for a Democratic Society Gregory Calvert wrote:

The importance of American aggressive imperialism for the development of a domestic movement, the importance of Vietnam and the Vietnams to come, is that it reveals America to America, that the liberal facade is shattered and the American expansionist system reveals its brutality and aggressiveness and its dehumanizing horror in all its nakedness.⁷⁹⁰

This radical dissent exploded onto the streets of New York and San Francisco on 15 April 1967. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was among the chief organizers of a protest in

⁷⁸⁹ Gregory Calvert, "In White America: Radical Consciousness And Social Change," Princeton Conference Speech, February 1967 published in *The National Guardian*, 25 March 1967, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 380.

⁷⁹⁰ Gregory Calvert, "In White America: Radical Consciousness And Social Change," Princeton Conference Speech, February 1967 published in *The National Guardian*, 25 March 1967, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 380.

New York that drew between 100,000 and 200,000 demonstrators to the United Nations.⁷⁹¹ The purpose of this protest was stated in a letter presented by the protest leaders to the United Nations Secretariat, reading:

We rally at the United Nations in order to affirm support of the [principles] of peace, universality, equal rights and self-determination of peoples embodied in the Charter and acclaimed by mankind, but violated by the United States.⁷⁹²

This Spring Mobilization also included a similar protest that drew about 50,000 demonstrators to San Francisco. At this protest, Mrs. Coretta King gave a speech calling on the President to “stop the bombing.”⁷⁹³

But it seemed the Spring Mobilization had alienated New Yorkers before it even began. An article about the impending protest from the *New York Times* warned that “the demonstration is expected to bring out several groups that have carried the blue and orange flag of the National Liberation Front in previous protests.” The story also warned that “a group of draft-age youths were expected to burn their [draft] cards at the outset of the demonstration.” Writer Douglas Robinson also warned that “the Spring Mobilization was joined by leftwing and radical groups, including Trotskyites, anarchists, Communists and Maoists.” The story also quoted King aide Rev. James Bevel as saying before the protest, “White Americans are not going to deal in the problems of colored people when they’re exterminating a whole nation of colored people.” The

⁷⁹¹ Douglas Robinson, “100,000 Rally at U.N. Against Vietnam War: Many Draft Cards Burned ...,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁹² Douglas Robinson, “100,000 Rally at U.N. Against Vietnam War: Many Draft Cards Burned ...,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁹³ Paul Hofmann, Special to *The New York Times*, “50,000 at San Francisco--Peace Rally,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 3.

very last sentence of the story made it clear where the *New York Times* stood on the protest: “A spokesman for the Communist party said that for the first time since the 1940s ‘there’ll be a number of us marching under the banner of our party.’”⁷⁹⁴

In April 1967 former Vice President Richard M. Nixon began a tour of Asia that culminated in a trip to Vietnam. From Tokyo on 7 April, Nixon derided the protesters in the United States: “I recognize the right of dissent, but...the divisions in the United States...[prolong] the war.”⁷⁹⁵ On 14 April 1967, Nixon travelled to Saigon. In advance of the impending Spring Mobilization, he called for unity, urging critics of the war inside the Democratic Party for “a moratorium on the kind of criticism that gives aid and comfort to the enemy.” Nixon again said that these divisions were a “major factor” in prolonging the war.⁷⁹⁶

Coverage of the protest itself, also written by Douglas Robinson for the *New York Times*, was as negative as his first article. Robinson cast the protesters as non-New Yorkers who “poured into New York on chartered buses, trains and cars from cities as far away as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Chicago.” He also noted that many young people chanted “Hey, Hey, L.B.J., How Many Kids Did You Kill Today?” (The capitalization is Robinson’s.) Robinson described New Yorkers greeting the protesters with “eggs and red paint.” Robinson also unabashedly portrayed the demonstrators as un-American; among those arrested, he wrote, were “three youths...taken into custody when they tried to rush a float that depicted the Statue of Liberty.”

⁷⁹⁴ Douglas Robinson, “Throngs to Parade To the U.N. Today For Antiwar Rally: ANTIWAR THRONGS TO PROTEST TODAY,” *New York Times*, 15 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁹⁵ *New York Times*, “Nixon Says Asians Back U.S. on War,” Tokyo, *New York Times*, 8 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 3.

⁷⁹⁶ Tom Buckley, Special to *The New York Times*, “NIXON URGES HALT: Says, in Saigon, That Division of Opinion Prolongs Fight,” *New York Times*, 15 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

Robinson also said that “200 [draft] cards were burned” in Central Park. Robinson’s assault on the Spring Mobilization culminated with his description of a group of protesters that had built a 40-foot tower and “attached a number of Liberation Front (Vietcong) flags, of blue and red with a gold star in the center.” Later, Robinson added, “unidentified demonstrators set fire to an American flag held up on a flagstaff in the park before the march began.”⁷⁹⁷

Coverage of the corresponding rally in San Francisco was a bit less adversarial. However, the report still noted that, except for western director of the United Auto Workers Paul Schrade, all of the other speakers called for unconditional and unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam. The story also noted that a group of black nationalists marched behind a banner reading “The Vietnam N.L.F. Never Called Us Niggers.” The story also noted that among the banners reading “Bring the GI’s Home!” and “Stop the Bombing!” was “one sign [that] showed the United States flag with a Nazi swastika superimposed.”⁷⁹⁸

Nixon’s reaction to the protests, given from his tour of Vietnam, was probably closer to the national mood. He said: “The irony is that marchers for peace prolong the war.” He added: “The enemy realizes they will never win the war here, but think they may win it in the United States.”⁷⁹⁹

The next day, Nixon followed with more criticism of dissenters. He railed against those Democratic members of Congress who were by their dissent contributing to the enemy’s

⁷⁹⁷ Douglas Robinson, “100,000 Rally at U.N. Against Vietnam War: Many Draft Cards Burned ...,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

⁷⁹⁸ Paul Hofmann, Special to *The New York Times*, “50,000 at San Francisco--Peace Rally,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 3.

⁷⁹⁹ *New York Times*, “Nixon Assails Protests,” United Press International, Saigon, *New York Times*, 17 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 9.

“monstrous delusion” that they could win the war.⁸⁰⁰ Specifically, he accused Senate Majority Leader Senator Mike Mansfield and Senator Robert F. Kennedy of “prolonging the war” with their dissent. He said that they were “misinformed but well intentioned,” claiming that they were “raising false hopes for peace in the United States.”⁸⁰¹ He attacked dissenters from the academic community, saying that they had tricked many young people into joining the peace movement. Nixon also took aim once more at the protesters, saying that there was “no question” that the American Communist party was involved in the peace movement.⁸⁰² Once more, radical activists were being dismissed in the media as aiding Communists.

As the Spring Mobilization ended, the President gave his answer to the demonstrators. On 20 April 1967, he began bombing Haiphong Harbor for the first time. This move was accompanied by a dramatic uptick in public approval of the President’s handling of the conflict. In late March, disapproval of the President’s handling of the war had settled at 44 percent (a drop of five points), with 39 percent approving (an increase of one percentage point).⁸⁰³ After the bombing began, these numbers almost completely reversed, with 43 percent of Americans approving of the President’s handling of the war (a jump of four points) and 42 percent disapproving (a drop of two points). And over a quarter of the Americans who disapproved of

⁸⁰⁰ Tom Buckley, Special to *The New York Times*, “Nixon Indicates He Seeks Step-Up in War Effort: Says Defeat of Foe in ...,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

⁸⁰¹ Associated Press, “Accuses 2 Senators,” Associated Press, Saigon, *New York Times*, 18 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

⁸⁰² Tom Buckley, Special to *The New York Times*, “Nixon Indicates He Seeks Step-Up in War Effort: Says Defeat of Foe in ...,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 2.

⁸⁰³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0743: Politics/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 30 March-4 April 1967), 5.

the President's policy still wanted him to be more aggressive in fighting the war. In fact, when Americans were asked specifically what they wanted the United States to "do next about Vietnam," only nine percent of Americans who had an opinion wanted to continue present policy, whereas 51 percent wanted to escalate the war in some way. After the escalation of the bombing, most Americans still felt that fighting the war was the right thing to do; 58 percent of those Americans who answered said that the United States did not make "a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam," and 69 percent believed that the United States' "part in the war in Vietnam [was] morally justified."⁸⁰⁴

There is evidence that this hardening of public opinion in support of the war was not just a reaction to the bombing of Haiphong Harbor but also a consequence of the protests in New York and San Francisco. When Americans were asked if they had "ever participated in a peace rally on Vietnam," 99 percent said "no." When these respondents were asked if they "would you like to participate in a rally if one were organized" in their area, 86 percent still responded "no."⁸⁰⁵

Westmoreland in Washington

By spring 1967, the administration had two growing problems with American public opinion of its handling of the war. First, "Hawks"—the majority of Americans—wanted the administration to be more aggressive in prosecuting the war. Second, and more seriously, most Americans believed the administration was lying to them about the war. However, instead of dealing with these problems, the administration continued to stubbornly use the ideology of

⁸⁰⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0744: Presidential Johnson/1968 Presidential Election/George Wallace* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 April 1967), 6-12.

⁸⁰⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966-0744: Presidential Johnson/1968 Presidential Election/George Wallace* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 April 1967), 6-12.

military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam—sentiments with which most Americans already agreed. This did have the effect of refocusing opposition to the war on attacks on the administration’s use of containment. However, this did nothing to address its problems with “Hawks” or with those who doubted its credibility.

In mid-1967 The administration enlisted General William C. Westmoreland—commander of Military Assistance Command-Vietnam—and General Harold K. Johnson—Army Chief of Staff—in the public debate over the Vietnam War to attack dissenters and offer ambitious predictions for the future. Just as these generals were raising public expectations to unreasonably high levels, two Associate Press reporters raised new questions about the Gulf of Tonkin incident that began a chain reaction that would ultimately end the Johnson Presidency and permanently transform the public debate over the Vietnam War.

In March 1967, President Johnson rejoined the Vietnam debate, returning to his use of containment to justify the war. He began by asserting his positive interpretation of the domino theory. The President told the Tennessee legislature that there was “growing evidence that the defense of Viet-Nam held the key to the political and economic future of free Asia.” Some, the President claimed, had ignored this evidence.⁸⁰⁶ The veiled reference to the Congress was unmistakable:

As our commitment in Viet-Nam required more men and more equipment, some voices were raised in opposition. The administration was urged to disengage, to find

⁸⁰⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by President Johnson before a Joint Session of the Tennessee State Legislature at Nashville, Tennessee on March 15, 1967; ‘The Defense of Viet-Nam: Key to the Future of Free Asia,’ Department of State Bulletin, April 3, 1967, p. 534” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-107, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

an excuse to abandon the effort.⁸⁰⁷

The President insisted that the United States had to persevere in South Vietnam in order to “lay the cornerstone for a diverse and independent Asia, full of promise and resolute in the cause of peaceful economic development.” President Johnson concluded by restating the lessons of Munich. If the United States “faltered, the forces of chaos would scent victory and decades of strife and aggression would stretch endlessly before us.”⁸⁰⁸

In late April 1967, Lyndon Johnson recalled General William Westmoreland, Commander of Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MAC-V) and the senior U.S. ground forces commander in South Vietnam, to confer on the war and speak before Congress.⁸⁰⁹ But Westmoreland also spoke publicly in other forums. In each speech, he reinforced the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify military intervention. He also joined former Vice President Nixon in attacking criticism against the war itself as sowing disunity and weakening the American war effort in Vietnam.

⁸⁰⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by President Johnson before a Joint Session of the Tennessee State Legislature at Nashville, Tennessee on March 15, 1967; ‘The Defense of Viet-Nam: Key to the Future of Free Asia,’ Department of State Bulletin, April 3, 1967, p. 534” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-107, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁸⁰⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address by President Johnson before a Joint Session of the Tennessee State Legislature at Nashville, Tennessee on March 15, 1967; ‘The Defense of Viet-Nam: Key to the Future of Free Asia,’ Department of State Bulletin, April 3, 1967, p. 534” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-107, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁸⁰⁹ Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War. Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume VIII: B—U.S.-GVJN Relations. Volume 2: July 1965-December 1967, xvi, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Nationally syndicated commentator James Marlow described Westmoreland's trip to the United States as part of an escalation of the war by the White House "on two fronts," a reference to the administration's decision to begin bombing MIG airfields in North Vietnam earlier in the month. Marlow virtually ignored Westmoreland's use of ideology of containment of Communism to justify the war and instead focused on the claim that, in Marlow's words, "the criticism here at home gives the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese an impression of American disunity and encourages them to keep fighting." Marlow noted that Senator George McGovern claimed the President had "put [Westmoreland] up to saying" these things. But Marlow also noted that former U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge had made similar accusations in a *New York Times* interview. Marlow quoted Lodge as saying (in a veiled reference to the Salisbury dispatches) that the United States would be more successful in the war "if, in the United States, we were to give the appearance of unity and if it were no longer possible for Hanoi to toss in some kind of bone and we all start snarling at each other over it." Marlow wrote that Lodge's criticism was especially credible since Lodge was both a Republican and no longer a member of the government.⁸¹⁰

While Westmoreland blasted the President's critics, the administration continued to use the ideology of military containment to justify the war. William P. Bundy claimed that the United States was in Vietnam to "preserve South Viet-Nam's right to work out its own future without external interference." The United States was also acting, Bundy claimed, "to fulfill a commitment that evolved through the actions of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson." Bundy added that U.S. presence in South Vietnam proved that the United States would honor its

⁸¹⁰ James Marlow, "James Marlow Reports," Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Gettysburg Times*, Gettysburg, PA, 27 April 1967, 15.

commitments to all of the nations of Southeast Asia whose “security requires a continuing United States ability to act.” Addressing growing Senate dissent, Bundy added that this commitment was enshrined in “the SEATO treaty, overwhelmingly ratified by the Senate in 1954.”⁸¹¹ Bundy did not mention the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In fact, after the President’s 1967 State of the Union Address, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution once more disappeared from administration rhetoric. With the threat of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee diminished, it was no longer necessary for the administration to invoke its insurance policy against Congressional dissent.

The administration’s focus on the ideology of containment—rather than on bolstering its credibility or explaining why it did not take more aggressive action in Vietnam—was tragically unnecessary. The American people already understood and accepted the administration’s insistence that it must contain Communism in Vietnam. When Gallup asked Americans to explain why the United States was fighting in Vietnam in their “own words,” fully 23 percent of Americans said the United States was fighting to “stop the spread of Communism.” Six percent of Americans responded that the United States was fighting to protect “the right of the South Vietnamese to choose their own form of government.” Another four percent echoed the administration’s argument that Communism was an external threat that the United States had to “keep...out of...South Vietnam.” Four percent said the United States was fighting to bring peace to Vietnam. The same number of Americans echoed the most extreme predictions of the domino

⁸¹¹ William P. Bundy, “Address by William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, before the national Executive Committee of the American Legion at Indianapolis, Indiana on May 3, 1967; ‘Seventeen Years in East Asia,’ Department of State Bulletin, May 22, 1967, p. 790,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-107-109, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

theory, saying that the United States was “trying to keep the Communists from ruling the world,” while another two percent provided a variation on this theme, that the United States was fighting to “keep war from our continent.” Three percent argued that the United States was fighting in Vietnam to protect the credibility of its commitments worldwide or to “show we are willing to help.” Two percent of Americans said that the United States was acting at the request of the South Vietnamese to stop “aggression” and the “spread of Communism.” All told, only six percent argued that the United States was fighting the war in Vietnam for any other reason than a reason that had been repeatedly espoused by the President, the administration, and sympathetic media. And none of the respondents who gave a reason other than an argument based on the military containment of Communism echoed the alternative reasons given by radical dissenters, such as imperialism or racism.⁸¹²

The administration was preaching to the converted when it argued for the need to contain Communism in Southeast Asia. Likewise, the administration and its supporters were wasting their time attacking dissenters; the American people already rejected those dissenters who attacked the applicability of military containment to the war in Vietnam or the ideology of military containment itself. Meanwhile attacks against the administration’s credibility and demands for more aggressive action in Vietnam went unanswered.

The administration’s obsession with using the ideology of containment to justify the war did have the effect of refocusing dissent on this unassailable front, rather than on its credibility. In June 1967, *Value Line Investment Survey* published a scathing indictment of the ideology of military containment. The *Survey* wrote: “The futility of the containment policy was highlighted

⁸¹² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0745:Johnson/Vietnam/Education/Elections* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 11-16 May 1967), 11-12.

a few years ago when a Communist state sprang up off our very shores [in Cuba]” as well as in Vietnam. “The Containment Policy is merely a negative military response,” the *Survey* noted, “to Communist initiative wherever and whenever the Communists choose to take it.” The *Survey* opposed containment because its cost in “accelerating inflation alone is almost incalculable.” While the *Survey* admitted that containment might have been effective immediately after World War II, it added, “Its establishment as a long term policy has cost this country thousands of lives, billions of dollars, and the distrust of nearly all nations.” Even worse, the *Survey* also wrote, “it has not stopped the spread of Communism, nor will it.” While the *Survey* admitted that the United States did have interests in Southeast Asia and a legal basis to prosecute the war in Vietnam, the article said, “U.S. interests in that part of the world are peripheral, at most, its commitments nebulous, to say the least, and its identification with the will or the people or the area most doubtful.” The *Survey* also made the novel argument that the turn of underdeveloped nations to Communism might be good for world stability, since “people sweating their lives out to produce both food and capital” under an inefficient and exploitative Communist regime “have little time or energy for military adventure.” Moreover, the *Survey* claimed, “These underdeveloped nations...create a strain on the troubled economies of the Soviet Union and Communist China, sapping their ability to expand further.”⁸¹³

However, the administration’s obsession with justifying its intervention in Vietnam by invoking the ideology of containment also had the counterproductive effect of focusing the administration’s supporters in the media on this unnecessary topic (rather than defending the

⁸¹³ Value Line Investment Survey, “THE CONTAINMENT OF COMMUNISM—A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY,” *Value Line Investment Survey*, newsletter, New York, 23 June 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 5, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

administration's credibility or explaining the dangers of further escalation). For instance, the leaking of a Republican position paper on the war in Vietnam provided an opportunity for the Associated Press to defend the administration's argument that it had inherited its policies in Vietnam from previous administrations. According to the AP, "the report's main point is that the Democrats, under Presidents Johnson and John F. Kennedy, and not the Republicans under President Dwight D. Eisenhower," had started America's war in Vietnam. The article took issue with this contention, noting that "Truman began a policy of giving the French aid" during their war against the Viet Minh and "Eisenhower continued the Truman aid policy" because "he shared Truman's fears about the Communist intentions." The AP also noted that Eisenhower had espoused the domino theory and had contended that that "Vietnam was the cork in the bottle," the key to containing Communism in Southeast Asia. The article did admit that Eisenhower opposed the deployment of troops. However, the AP added that it was not until "South Vietnam seemed in danger of being engulfed by the Viet Cong and the North" that President Johnson sent troops to Vietnam. The AP concluded that "[b]oth Kennedy and Johnson shared the Truman-Eisenhower fear that communism was on the march and had to be stopped."⁸¹⁴

While the public clearly embraced the President's reasons for intervening militarily in Vietnam, by mid-May they once more disapproved of his handling of that intervention.⁸¹⁵ In late May 1967, the U.S. and South Vietnamese troops entered the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam to engage the North Vietnamese Army for the first time. After this

⁸¹⁴ Associated Press, "World Today," Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Warsaw Times-Union*, Warsaw, IN, 9 May 1967, 16.

⁸¹⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0746: Vietnam/Middle East/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 2-7 June 1967), 5.

escalation, approval of the President's handling of the war rebounded slightly.⁸¹⁶ But this bump in approval was short-lived. By mid-July, 52 percent disapproved of the President's handling of the war, while approval had dropped to 34 percent.⁸¹⁷ Still, Americans had not abandoned support for the war itself. When asked, 54 percent of Americans who had an opinion believed the United States had not "made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam." Moreover, only 12 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion believed the United States was losing the war in Vietnam. The remainder believed the United States was either at a standstill or "making progress."⁸¹⁸

In mid-July 1967, with the American public increasingly doubting the administration's credibility on the Vietnam War, most Americans demanding more aggressive action in Vietnam, and approval of the President's handling of the war at an all-time low, Associated Press writers Harry F. Rosenthal and Tom Stewart published an article about the Gulf of Tonkin incident that set in motion a chain of events that would end the Johnson Presidency and ultimately end the Vietnam War. The article itself initially got very little attention, and it was not even published in many AP outlets. But the article did appear in a few papers across the country, including the *Arkansas Gazette*, from Senator Fulbright's home state of Arkansas.⁸¹⁹

The article itself was extraordinary in that it was the first serious questioning of the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in the national media:

⁸¹⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0747: Vietnam War/Politics* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 22-27 June 1967), 6-9.

⁸¹⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0748: Vietnam/Civil Rights/Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 13-18 July 1967), 5.

⁸¹⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0748: Vietnam/Civil Rights/Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 13-18 July 1967), 6-7.

⁸¹⁹ Harry F. Rosenthal, Tom Stewart, "Tonkin Gulf," Associated Press, *Arkansas Gazette*, 16 July 1967, reprinted in *Congressional Record* by U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., 28 February 1968, 4582.

What happened that week in the Gulf of Tonkin? ...Who fired the first shot, and why? Was it a warning, as officially announced, or was it a salvo to kill? Was the Maddox on a routine patrol—and if so, what about the mysterious “black box” so prominent between her stacks? What about that somewhat wraithlike second engagement—on a night that was “dark as the hubs of hell”—in which many of those involved had serious doubts that they were firing at a real enemy? Had the Maddox participated in, or provided cover for, a South Vietnamese attack on a North Vietnamese island in the same area a few days before, as Hanoi charged?⁸²⁰

These were questions that had seldom been expressed since August 1964, and certainly never expressed together nor in such an accusatory tone by a national news source.

Rosenthal and Stewart’s answers to these questions were even more incendiary. The article told of an electronic countermeasure suite brought aboard to monitor North Vietnamese communications—“nobody was allowed in there”—and its cryptic caretakers who “kept pretty much to themselves.” Lt. Raymond Connell, officer of the deck on the *Maddox* on 2 August 1964 said that the first shots were fired by U.S. warships and were not warning shots: “It was shoot to kill.” The situation on the night of 4 August 1964, Rosenthal and Stewart wrote, was confused, with ships not tracking the same enemy targets. Lt. Connell said flatly: “We didn’t have any targets.” Aircraft scoured the area but could not find the enemy PT boats that the destroyers claimed they detected. Even Captain Barnhart of the *Turner Joy* admitted: “Contacts could have been caused by the turbulence the ships created themselves; the radar contact might have been caused by the weather; the torpedo sightings may have been in error,” though he insisted that he had seen a spotlight from a PT boat. Rosenthal and Stewart added: “The North

⁸²⁰ Harry F. Rosenthal, Tom Stewart, “U.S. Involvement Started in Tonkin Gulf,” Associated Press, *Post-Crescent*, Appleton, WI, 16 July 1967, 26.

Vietnamese regime branded the account of the night incident a fabrication” and, more damning, “The Congress was told nothing” of the administration’s own doubts about the incident.⁸²¹

The administration, like much of the country, ignored this report. Instead, the administration fired the final salvo in its summer 1967 effort to rally support for its policies in Vietnam. In August 1967, on the heels of a request for an additional 45,000 troops for Vietnam, Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson went on an 11-day tour of Vietnam.⁸²² Upon his return, in talks with the press, General Johnson attacked those who claimed the Vietnam War had become a stalemate and instead claimed, “We’re winning the war.” Johnson also claimed that the 45,000-troop increase would be the last, saying, “This [troop increase] should be, with circumstances substantially as they are now, adequate to provide a degree of momentum that will see us through to a solution in Vietnam.” Under cross-examination, Johnson provided some caveats to this prediction: the new troop level of 525,000 would be enough as long as North Korea or Communist China did not send troops to South Vietnam and as long as the bombing of North Vietnam continued at its then current rate.⁸²³

This final caveat provided an opportunity for journalist Hedrick Smith, reporting for the *New York Times*, to attack the administration’s credibility on the war. Days earlier, Chief of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff and Defense Minister General Cao Van Vien said in a

⁸²¹ Harry F. Rosenthal, Tom Stewart, “U.S. Involvement Started in Tonkin Gulf,” Associated Press, *Post-Crescent*, Appleton, WI, 16 July 1967, 26.

⁸²² Vietnam Task Force, “Chronology,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] *Evolution of the War*. Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume VIII: B—U.S.-GVJN Relations. Volume 2: July 1965-December 1967, xvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁸²³ Hedrick Smith [Special to *The New York Times*], “ARMY CHIEF SEES END OF BUILD-UP: ‘We’re Winning,’ Declares General,” Washington, D.C., *New York Times* 13 August 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times*, 10.

news conference that he believed that bombing of the north could never control enemy infiltration. General Johnson still insisted that, because of the bombing of bridges and transports, North Vietnamese “reinforcements have had to walk farther.” Johnson added that, based on interrogations of enemy prisoners, “as many as 20 per cent” of the soldiers sent to South Vietnam were “falling out from sickness or death.” Still, many in the press took Vien’s statement as an admission that the bombing of North Vietnam did not work.⁸²⁴

Despite this press skepticism, General Johnson continued to express unbridled enthusiasm about the prospects for the war. Johnson claimed that there would be “very real evidence of progress and forward movement” in Vietnam by the end of the year. Johnson also maintained that, for the first time in this trip, he had seen “significant evidence of progress” in the quality of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). He predicted similar progress in the security of roads and the growth of the South Vietnamese economy by the end of the year.⁸²⁵

The administration’s counteroffensive against its critics, ending as it did with these optimistic predictions, could not have been more poorly timed. At the same time Johnson was making these statements, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were preparing to launch a massive, nation-wide assault in South Vietnam—the Tet Offensive. These two forces would collide in early 1968 and set the stage for a *coup de grâce* by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that would destroy public faith in the administration’s credibility.

⁸²⁴ Hedrick Smith [Special to *The New York Times*], “ARMY CHIEF SEES END OF BUILD-UP: ‘We’re Winning,’ Declares General,” Washington, D.C., *New York Times* 13 August 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times*, 10.

⁸²⁵ Hedrick Smith [Special to *The New York Times*], “ARMY CHIEF SEES END OF BUILD-UP: ‘We’re Winning,’ Declares General,” Washington, D.C., *New York Times* 13 August 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times*, 10.

In the two years following the President's announcement of massive troop deployments to Vietnam on 28 July 1965, the framework of public debate over the Vietnam War remained largely unchanged. The President and the administration and their supporters in the media and Congress argued for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam using the ideology of military containment. Opponents of U.S. military intervention—the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, radical protesters, academics, and media commentators chief among them—tried to change the President's policies in Vietnam by arguing against the suitability of the strategy of military containment of Communism to Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Only a few times during this period did the administration rely on the precedent set by the Gulf of Tonkin incident to justify military intervention in Vietnam. Most frequently, officials in the administration testifying before Congress occasionally reminded Members of Congress that they had overwhelmingly approved the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—wielding the resolution like an “insurance policy” against Congressional dissent. However, the administration also relied on the tit-for-tat precedent established by the reprisal airstrikes in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident on at least one occasion to justify new bombing in Hanoi. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, along with the Constitutional powers of the President, and prior Congressional expressions of support for South Vietnamese independence such as the ratification of the SEATO treaty was also occasionally invoked as the administration's legal justifications for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

Some opponents—especially radical protesters—also occasionally attacked the entire ideology of military containment of Communism, not just in Vietnam, but anywhere. These critiques were most dramatically expressed during the march on Washington in November 1965

and the even larger Spring Mobilization in April 1967. These arguments and the protesters who made them alienated most Americans and were widely rejected.

The scale and breadth of criticism of the entire ideology of containment and even the narrower criticism of the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam is truly breathtaking when compared to the political climate in America between the beginning of the Cold War and 1964, when attacks on the ideology of containment and U.S. military intervention abroad were rare, even in Congress. Before 1965, criticism of the ideology of containment or its application to any given region was simply beyond the pale of acceptable public discourse on foreign policy. The controversy sparked by the Vietnam War had suddenly and dramatically opened these topics to debate.

Most importantly, within this *mélange* of opponents of the war, there was a core of dissenters in Congress, academia, and the New Left who did not just seek an end to the Vietnam War, but an end to the stranglehold the ideology of containment had on American foreign policy. These foreign policy revolutionaries opposed the ideology of containment for different reasons. Congressional and academic revolutionaries saw the war in Vietnam as a logical consequence of this outmoded ideological foreign policy framework and believed that containment had eroded the role of the Congress in foreign policymaking. Radical revolutionaries believed that rabid anticommunism had made America imperialistic abroad and repressive at home. All wanted to see the United States move beyond the ideology of military containment of Communism to a new foreign policy paradigm.

However, while many dissenters on the war had abandoned the Cold War consensus, the American public continued to believe in the precepts of the ideology of containment. Despite over two years of relentless attack by opponents of the war, most Americans continued to believe

that the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia was a necessary goal and that the war in Vietnam was required to achieve this goal. Moreover, most Americans were “Hawks,” wanting the United States to be even more aggressive in defending the sovereignty of South Vietnam from what they saw as aggression from North Vietnam, supported by China and the Soviet Union.

Prior to fall 1966, attacks on the President’s credibility were rare, centered on claims that the administration was being dishonest about progress in the war. In late 1966, critiques of the administration’s credibility on the war began to gain momentum. Critics first questioned the administration’s credibility concerning civilian casualties in the bombing of the north. Then they attacked the President’s credibility about his willingness to negotiate with the north. These critiques resonated with the American people, and many began to question Presidential credibility on the war.

The President and the administration never explained to the “Hawks” why they could not use more aggressive means in Vietnam. Likewise, the President and the administration never effectively addressed growing doubts about their credibility. Instead, the administration doggedly continued to justify the war using the ideology of military containment. It is the failure to address these concerns, rather than the failure of the President to justify military intervention in Vietnam, that led to the continuing decline in public approval of the President’s handling of the war in 1966 and 1967.

In late summer 1967, two Associated Press reporters questioned the administration’s account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident just as administration officials were making their boldest predictions yet about success in Vietnam. Soon after, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would make the fateful decision to hold hearings in 1968 not on the administration’s use of

military containment to justify the Vietnam War but on the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. These hearings would occur just as the Vietnamese Communists' 1968 Tet Offensive called into question the credibility of the administration's optimistic predictions from summer 1967.

The convergence of these events would dramatically alter the course of the war. This collision ended the Johnson Presidency and changed the framework of the public debate over the war from arguments over the applicability of the ideology of containment to Vietnam to arguments over the credibility of the government on the issue of Vietnam. This latter change would ultimately end the war in Vietnam.

Chapter 4 - The Collapse of Credibility

By late 1967, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was determined to weaken administration's insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—which the administration had begun to ever more forcefully wield. Thus, Senator J. William Fulbright and his staff made the fateful decision to hold hearings in 1968 not on the administration's use of the containment of Communism to justify the war but on the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Fulbright and his staff made this decision because they had concluded that attacking the administration's use of containment to justify the war had failed to persuade the American public or the Congress to oppose the war. They concluded that, in fact, these arguments against the ideology of military containment of Communism—the Cold War consensus—had caused American people to begin rejecting critics of the war.

These hearings would occur just as North Vietnam and the Viet Cong launched a massive, nationwide surprise offensive in January 1968—the Tet Offensive—that called into question the credibility of the administration's optimistic predictions from summer and fall 1967. Some opponents had already begun, as early as late 1966, to attack the administration's credibility on issues such as civilian casualties caused by the bombing of the north and the administration's true willingness to negotiate. By February 1968, most Americans already believed the administration was lying to them; the 1968 Fulbright hearings were simply a dramatic and conclusive final proof of administration deception.

The convergence of these events would dramatically alter the course of the war. This collision ended the Johnson Presidency and changed the framework of the public debate over the war. While supporters of the Vietnam War continued to use the ideology of containment to justify the war, opponents began to focus increasingly on a Presidential “credibility gap” on

Vietnam. Their first target was inconsistency in the administration's version of the events surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin incident. But attacks on the President's credibility rapidly expanded to virtually every facet of the administration's prosecution of the war.

While these attacks were effective in persuading many in Congress to oppose the war and did convince most Americans to reject President Johnson—and his heir-apparent, Vice President Hubert Humphrey—these attacks did not convince most Americans to abandon the war. Instead, these attacks convinced a narrow majority of Americans to support Richard Nixon and trust his unspecified policies to bring the war to an honorable end.

By August 1967, most Americans were losing patience with the administration's refusal to "go all out" to win the war in Vietnam. The President saw a serious erosion of support for his handling of Vietnam. At the beginning of August only 32 percent of Americans approved of his handling of the war, while 54 percent of Americans disapproved.⁸²⁶ By the end of August, approval fell further, to 27 percent, with 60 percent disapproving. As had been the case earlier in the summer, much of this disapproval was a result of the American public's desire for more aggressive action in Vietnam. Of those who disapproved, 18 percent wanted the President to be "more aggressive" and "go all out." Another nine percent believed the United States "should either go all out or get out." Less than one percent, however, wanted to send "more men and material." When asked how they "feel about the war in Vietnam" most Americans clearly wanted to continue the war. Only 35 percent of those who had an opinion believed "the U.S. should begin to withdraw its troops." By contrast, 11 percent thought that "the U.S. should carry

⁸²⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0749: Race Relations* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 3-8 August 1967), 5-7, 9.

on its present level of fighting”; and the majority of Americans who had an opinion—54 percent—felt that “the U.S. should increase the strength of its attacks against North Vietnam.” Americans also rejected dissenters’ argument that the United States risked drawing the Communist Chinese into the war; these Americans wanted to escalate even though most who had an opinion (52 percent) believed that “if the North Vietnamese show signs of giving in...Communist China will...send many troops to help North Vietnam.”⁸²⁷

There are also indications that those Americans who wanted to escalate the war were beginning to look to the Republican Party. When asked who they thought “would be in a better position to bring an end to the war in Vietnam—a Democratic president or a Republican president,” the largest percentage of Americans who had an opinion (40 percent) said it would make “no difference.” However, of those who felt it would make a difference, 59 percent chose Republicans.⁸²⁸

Most in the media continued to echo the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify the Vietnam War throughout late summer 1967. In an article in August 1967, Associated Press commentator James Marlow supported the President’s claim that he was simply continuing his predecessor’s policies. Marlow noted that President Truman “gave the French billions of dollars in aid, starting in 1950, to help them stop the Communists in Indochina.” After partition, he added, President Eisenhower continued to support South Vietnam and “entered into an agreement—the Southeast Asia Treaty—with other nations in the area to help them or their neighbors repel Communist aggression.” Marlow quoted Eisenhower as

⁸²⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0750:Johnson/Vietnam/Religion/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 August 1967), 5-9.

⁸²⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0750:Johnson/Vietnam/Religion/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 24-29 August 1967), 12.

supporting the “‘falling domino’ theory” by saying that the fall of South Vietnam would lead to a “crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom.” Marlow also noted that President Kennedy “agreed with Eisenhower’s domino theory.”⁸²⁹

While some in the media had begun attacking administration’s credibility, most of the administration’s opponents in the media directed their attacks against the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify the war. In a story about Senator Stuart Symington’s dissent on the war, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* mocked the administration’s stubborn insistence on recounting its justification’s for the war in Vietnam. The *Post-Gazette* claimed that “President Johnson simply is not explaining our presence there in generally acceptable terms,” but that by now Americans “should know his explanations by rote.” Still, this editorial insisted, Americans “simply aren’t buying them.”⁸³⁰ In fact, contemporary polling data showed that they were buying them; most Americans, when asked, echoed the President’s use of the ideology of containment to justify for the war.⁸³¹

By late summer and early fall 1967, many in Congress were expressing serious doubts about the administration’s policies in Southeast Asia. This dissent was also squarely focused on the administration’s use of the ideology of military containment to justify military intervention in the region. In an interview with the *New York Times*’ Don Oberdorfer, Senator Richard B. Russell said that he regretted having not publicly objected thirteen years earlier when Assistant Secretary of State Thruston B. Morton told him that the Eisenhower administration was sending

⁸²⁹ James Marlow, “Interpreting the News: US Caught in Vietnam War Box,” Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Kentucky New Era*, Hopkinsville, KY, 21 August 1967, 3.

⁸³⁰ Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, “Senate Reflects Agony of War,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 4 October 1967, 5.

⁸³¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0745:Johnson/Vietnam/Education/Elections* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 11-16 May 1967), 11-12.

military aid to Vietnam. Oberdorfer also noted that Morton, now a Senator, had since reversed himself on Vietnam. Morton argued: “Japan to an extent should take the lead in the Orient. We just cannot police this entire world.”⁸³² Senator Milton R. Young, senior Republican on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, had also joined this dissent, arguing that Cuba was more important and Vietnam was not “worth the price.”⁸³³

President Johnson responded to growing Congressional dissent by finally fully invoking his insurance policy against this dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—in a speech before the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio on 29 September 1967. Johnson said that the United States had made commitments to defend South Vietnam. These commitments, he claimed, came from the SEATO treaty but were also reasserted by “Members of the United States Congress...in a resolution that it passed in 1964 by a vote of 504 to 2.”⁸³⁴ Johnson said this resolution gave him authority:

...to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.⁸³⁵

Johnson also reiterated that containment of Communism required U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The President said: “Three Presidents and the elected representatives of

⁸³² Don Oberdorfer, “Noninterventionism, 1967 Style,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1967, SM115, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993).

⁸³³ Don Oberdorfer, “Noninterventionism, 1967 Style,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1967, SM115, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993).

⁸³⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas,” 29 September 1967, Reprinted online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28460>, accessed 15 July 2014.

⁸³⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas,” 29 September 1967, Reprinted online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28460>, accessed 15 July 2014.

our people have chosen to defend this Asian nation.” Further, Johnson explained that Communist “aggression was a threat not only to the immediate victim but to the United States of America and to the peace and security of the entire world of which we in America are a very vital part.” Returning to the lessons of Munich, Johnson said: “All that we have learned in this tragic century strongly suggest[s]” that a “Southeast Asia dominated by Communist power would bring a third world war much closer to terrible reality.” This warning was accompanied by a lengthy proof of the domino theory using the statements of leaders from the region. The President concluded: “By seeing this struggle through now we are greatly reducing the chances of a much larger war—perhaps a nuclear war.”⁸³⁶

However, the main purpose of the President’s speech was to outline his terms for peace. In fact, this marked the first time the administration would address attacks on his credibility—in this case claims that he did not truly desire peace. Johnson said he knew that “many sincere, troubled Americans” were asking the question, “Why not negotiate now?” To those critics who said he did not really want peace, Johnson again assured Americans that he was prepared to negotiate with anyone, any place, at any time. However, he conditioned any ceasefire on a commitment “that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.”⁸³⁷

⁸³⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks by President Johnson to the National Legislative Conference at San Antonio, Texas on September 29, 1967; ‘Answering Aggression In Viet-Nam,’ Department of State Publication 8305, East Asian and Pacific Series 167, Released October 1967,” Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-120-123, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁸³⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas,” 29 September 1967, Reprinted online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28460>, accessed 15 July 2014.

The President's invocation of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent was echoed by his administration. Dean Rusk said in a news conference that the Congress had called Asian security vital, adding that it was "where two-thirds of the world's people live, no less vital to us as a nation than is peace in our own hemisphere or in the NATO area."⁸³⁸ Rusk then even more explicitly invoked the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent, insisting:

Now what I don't understand is that Senators would declare in August, 1964, that the United States considers it a vital national interest of this country that there be international peace and security of Southeast Asia. And, then, two years later, some of them seem to brush that aside as having no validity.⁸³⁹

Rusk quipped: "On which occasion were they right?" Rusk added: "These are not matters that change with the wind."⁸⁴⁰ Rusk repeated this point in an interview with USIA a few days later.⁸⁴¹

Two weeks later, in an address in Columbus, Indiana, Rusk didn't name the Tonkin Gulf

⁸³⁸ Dean Rusk, "Secretary Rusk's news Conference of October 12, 1967; Department of State Press Release No. 227, October 12, 1967," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-123-126, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁸³⁹ Dean Rusk, "Transcript of Secretary Rusk's News Conference on Foreign Affairs Questions," Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 13 October 1967, 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993).

⁸⁴⁰ Dean Rusk, "Transcript of Secretary Rusk's News Conference on Foreign Affairs Questions," Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 13 October 1967, 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993).

⁸⁴¹ Dean Rusk, "Interview with Secretary Rusk, Videotaped at USIA Studios in Washington, D.C. on October 16, 1967 and Later Broadcast Abroad; 'Secretary Rusk Discusses Viet-Nam in Interview for Foreign Television,' Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, p. 595," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-126-129, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

Resolution but quoted it.⁸⁴² The administration had clearly made the decision to use the Resolution to finally silence Congressional dissent.

Media supporters echoed the administration's confrontational tone in asserting that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution gave the President authority to fight the war—and in reminding the public of Senator J. William Fulbright's role in passing that resolution. In an August 1967 article, commentator James Marlow recounted the administration's version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and then recalled that as a result, the President had "asked Congress to approve a resolution backing him up. Congress did on Aug. 7, 1964, in a joint resolution which the House okayed 416 to 0 and the Senate approved 88 to 2." Marlow then recalled that Senator Wayne Morse had proposed repealing the resolution.⁸⁴³ Marlow added:

Before the senators voted, Johnson sent word that those who wanted to "reverse" the 1964 resolution because they had a "change of heart" should go ahead and vote that way. But the Senate killed the Morse proposal 92 to 5 by tabling it. One of the five voting against tabling was Sen. J.W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. He'd had a change of heart.⁸⁴⁴

Marlow reminded his readers that Fulbright "was the one who had steered the Tonkin resolution through the Senate in 1964." Marlow derided Fulbright for his supposed claim that "he didn't realize how much of a blank check the resolution had given Johnson." (This was, of course, not the complaint Fulbright had made; Fulbright's completely factual complaint was that the

⁸⁴² Dean Rusk, "Address by Secretary Rusk (Excerpt) made at Columbus, Indiana, October 30, 1967; 'Firmness and Restraint in Viet-Nam,' Department of State Bulletin, November 27, 1967, p. 703," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part V. A.] Justification of the War. Public Statements. Volume II: D--The Johnson Administration, D-132-134, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>

⁸⁴³ James Marlow, "Interpreting the News: US Caught in Vietnam War Box," Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Kentucky New Era*, Hopkinsville, KY, 21 August 1967, 3.

⁸⁴⁴ James Marlow, "Interpreting the News: US Caught in Vietnam War Box," Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Kentucky New Era*, Hopkinsville, KY, 21 August 1967, 3.

President had assured the Senate he would not use the resolution to go to war.) And while Marlow noted that more than half of Senators disapproved of the President's policies in Vietnam for one reason or another, Fulbright would not accept the President's challenge to once again attempt to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.⁸⁴⁵

While the President and the administration had finally unleashed the full power of their insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—it had little effect on approval of Johnson's handling of Vietnam. In September approval of his handling of the war had risen slightly, by two points, to 29 percent, while disapproval had only dropped by two points to 58 percent.⁸⁴⁶ More importantly, however, this aggressive use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was almost certainly a factor in Senator J. William Fulbright's decision to hold hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident in early 1968.

The October 1967 Mobilization

In October 1967, radical protesters mounted a 200,000-man march on Washington that they called the Mobilization.⁸⁴⁷ As with previous radical protests, the Mobilization was roundly rejected by both the media and the American people. And, just as with previous protests, there is evidence that the Mobilization actually bolstered public support of the President's policies in Vietnam. Radical protesters left the Mobilization further radicalized and increasingly disillusioned with the stubborn resilience of the popular Cold War consensus. Many began to see the American public not as the target of persuasion but the obstacle to change.

⁸⁴⁵ James Marlow, "Interpreting the News: US Caught in Vietnam War Box," Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Kentucky New Era*, Hopkinsville, KY, 21 August 1967, 3.

⁸⁴⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0751: Labor Unions/Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 14-19 September 1967), 5.

⁸⁴⁷ Lagguth, *Our Vietnam*, 394; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 495.

Otherwise, the framework for debate of the war established in the previous two and half years—between the supporters of the President using containment to justify the war and opponents attacking the use of containment to justify the war—remained largely unchanged. In the aftermath of the Mobilization, some Members of Congress and some in the media reasserted their support for the administration’s use of containment to justify the war. Others in Congress and the media continued to oppose the administration’s use of containment to justify the war. At least one Republican Presidential hopeful also came out in opposition to the war, likewise contesting the administration’s use of the ideology of containment to justify the war.

The tactics and ideology of the radical protesters at the Mobilization alienated much of the American public. Demonstrators gave speeches and carried banners praising Communist revolutionary Che Guevara and Chinese Communist Mao Zedong. Political firebrand Abbie Hoffman promised to stop the war by using meditation to levitate the Pentagon ten feet off the ground and exorcize its evil spirits.⁸⁴⁸ Some of the protesters broke off from the main march, rushed the Pentagon, and were beaten by police and arrested.⁸⁴⁹

The public mood on the eve of the Mobilization was as favorable as it had been since the start of the Vietnam War to the aims of radical demonstrators. Two weeks before the march, when asked if they thought “the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam,” for the first time a majority Americans who had an opinion (52 percent) answered “yes.”⁸⁵⁰ Likewise, Americans, by an overwhelming majority, believed the administration was lying to them; seventy-seven percent of Americans who expressed an opinion believed that “the

⁸⁴⁸ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 459.

⁸⁴⁹ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 460.

⁸⁵⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0752: Vietnam/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 6-11 October 1967), 7.

Johnson administration...is not telling the public all they should know about the Vietnam war.” When Americans were asked if the United States should send troops “if a situation like Vietnam were to develop in another part of the world,” two thirds of Americans who had an opinion answered “no.”⁸⁵¹

However, Americans were not yet ready to quit the war. When asked how they “feel about the war in Vietnam,” only 33 percent of Americans who expressed a view wanted to withdraw. Eleven percent wanted to carry on the war at “its present level of fighting” and the greatest percentage (56 percent) believed the United States should increase the strength of its attacks against North Vietnam.” When asked specifically if they would support a bombing halt if it would “improve our chances in Vietnam for meaningful peace talks,” 70 percent of Americans who had an opinion would “continue bombing” North Vietnam. When Americans were asked specifically what they would do next, of those Americans who expressed a view, 73 percent opposed an extended bombing pause to promote negotiations, while 61 percent opposed the suggestion that the United States “should withdraw [its] troops now.” When asked if they would support the present plan—“continue to bomb selected targets in North Vietnam as at present and keep military pressures” until “the north agrees to negotiate”—the same percentage, approved of the plan. Americans only rejected the possible use of atomic weapons by a narrow margin (54 percent to 46 percent).⁸⁵²

There are some indications that Americans continued to support the war because they accepted the administration’s contention that military intervention was necessary to contain of

⁸⁵¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0752: Vietnam/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 6-11 October 1967), 9-12.

⁸⁵² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0752: Vietnam/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 6-11 October 1967), 9-12.

Communism. When asked if the Vietnam War would start or prevent World War III, by a narrow margin (51 percent to 49 percent) those Americans who had an opinion supported the administration's argument about the lessons of Munich, saying the Vietnam War "may prevent" World War III.⁸⁵³

The American people may have accepted the President's use of the containment of Communism to justify the war, but they did not trust or believe the President himself. Even sympathetic syndicated columnist Bruce Bioassat was forced to admit that "more and more, President Lyndon Johnson is being viewed by Americans as a man who cannot be believed." Bioassat could only defend the President by writing that his "opponents on the war issue are also something less than totally honest on the subject." He wrote that dissenters were disingenuous in ignoring "the consequences for both the Vietnamese and for all other free Asians" of failure in South Vietnam. Bioassat also had rare criticism for the "hawkish end," which he identified with the Republican Party, for being disingenuous in avoiding details when they demanded that the United States "pursue this war with [its] full military might." He also had criticism for "the country's radicals, white and black, [who] further erode credibility by preaching distrust of all established authority" while arguing against the war "without bothering to rub two facts together." Bioassat concluded: "Whatever the President's shortcomings in this field [credibility], he has much company."⁸⁵⁴

The media was as unsupportive of the October 1967 Mobilization as it had been of previous radical demonstrations. The Long Island *Newsday* said that "dissenters make up in

⁸⁵³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0752: Vietnam/1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 6-11 October 1967), 9-12.

⁸⁵⁴ Bruce Bioassat, "Credibility Is a Rarity In Our Public Affairs," Washington, DC, Newspaper Enterprise Association, *Owosso Argus-Press*, Owosso, MI, 29 September 1967, 4.

noise [what they] lack in numbers” but that these protesters “do not impress the great mass of Americans who remain quietly confident about our role in Vietnam and are aware of what would happen if we gave up the struggle.” *Newsday* derided the protesters as aiding the enemy: “antiwar demonstrations...give Ho Chi Minh false encouragement and the propaganda he requires to keep his people fighting.” The editorial lamented that Ho Chi Minh could not see the “silent center” of America, “the backbone of the nation” that was “naturally distressed [and] concerned but determined to see the war through to an honorable settlement that fortifies the sacrifices we have made to keep a tiny Asian nation free.”⁸⁵⁵

The *Canton Repository* from Canton, Ohio, was even more vitriolic in lashing out at demonstrators. The editors wrote that there was much more at stake in Vietnam than “has been expressed in the shrill yelps of bearded youths, their girlfriends and dreamy-eyed hippie cultists.” He added: “These people have opened a credibility gap of their own.” This editorial, too, spoke of a “great silent center” that was “fed up with the caterwauling of rioters and sensation-mongers threatening to turn a public issue into anarchy.”⁸⁵⁶

Pete Hamill of the *Washington News* was one of the few media figures to support radical protesters. In a fiery speech before the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, Hamill echoed much of the radical protesters’ discontent with the state of American society. Hamill also said that radical demonstrators were “really lecturing us”:

They are telling us that they no longer believe the tired rhetoric of the 1940s. They

⁸⁵⁵ *Newsday*, “The Silent Center,” *Newsday*, Long Island, NY, [October-November 1967], box 73 [2 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 Materials sent from John P. Roche, May 19, 1968-Vietnam, Committee to Support Administration Position, Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁸⁵⁶ *Canton Repository*, “The Great Silent Center,” *Canton Repository*, Canton, OH, [October-November 1967], box 73 [2 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 Materials sent from John P. Roche, May 19, 1968-Vietnam, Committee to Support Administration Position, Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

are telling us that they do not care whether some foreign country chooses one economic system over another, at least not while the climate of bigotry and injustice in this country makes our credibility very slim indeed.⁸⁵⁷

Hamill likewise echoed the radical theme that anticommunism had distorted American society.⁸⁵⁸

Radical protesters and their views alienated the American public. Pollster Lou Harris wrote in a *Washington Post* article in December that “the peace march to the Pentagon, the picketing of Administration officials, campus uprisings and clashes between draft protestors and police appear to have had an effect opposite to that intended by the organizers.” Specifically, he cited poll results showing that “the number of people doubtful about the Vietnamese war was 13 points higher before the recent wave of demonstrations than it is today.” He wrote that, as a result of the protests, more Americans supported the administration and the war in Vietnam. He also wrote, “Americans reject the militant methods pursued by some opponents of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.” Harris wrote that 76 percent of Americans believed that the demonstrations “encourage Communists to fight all the harder.” He also wrote that 68 percent of Americans believed the antiwar demonstrations were “acts of disloyalty against the boys in Vietnam.” Harris did admit that Americans accepted the right to dissent and the right to peacefully demonstrate, though he also noted that the percentage of people believing in these rights had dropped significantly since July 1967. Seventy percent of Americans, he added,

⁸⁵⁷ Pete Hamill [Washington News], speech to the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, New York, 8 December 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 5, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁵⁸ Pete Hamill [Washington News], speech to the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, New York, 8 December 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 5, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

believed that the antiwar protests displayed a “‘lack of dignity,’ ‘lack of respect for law and order’ and ‘exhibitionist behavior.’”⁸⁵⁹

There is also evidence that the Mobilization actually helped the President’s approval. After the Mobilization, a majority of Americans still disapproved of the President’s handling of Vietnam, but the margin of that disapproval had narrowed. Only 52 percent of Americans disapproved of the President’s handling of Vietnam (a drop of six percentage points). Thirty-seven percent of Americans now approved of the President’s handling of the war (an increase of eight points).⁸⁶⁰ By mid-November, public approval of the President’s handling of the war would increase further, with 40 percent approving (an increase of three points) and only 49 percent disapproving (a drop of three points).⁸⁶¹

More troubling for the President, however, support for his party continued to crumble. When asked “which political party—the Republican or the Democratic—do you think is better able to end the war in Vietnam,” 29 percent of Americans who had an opinion said they would do the “same.” However, the largest percentage (44 percent) now said the Republican Party would do a better job,⁸⁶² a jump of nine percentage points since late August.

Radical activists emerged from the October 1967 Mobilization even more radicalized and disconnected from the mainstream of American society. A narrative began to emerge among

⁸⁵⁹ Louis Harris, “Reaction to War Protesters Rises,” *Washington Post*, 18 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁶⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0753: Politics/Unions/Federal Poverty Programs* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 27 October-1 November 1967), 9.

⁸⁶¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0754: Politics/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 November 1967), 10.

⁸⁶² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0753: Politics/Unions/Federal Poverty Programs* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 27 October-1 November 1967), 12.

radicals after the Mobilization that American society was beyond saving. The radical magazine *The Movement* decried the American worker, who was “pushed unceasingly through the processing of school, military and job.” *The Movement* wrote that, to succeed, radicals must break “the massive, unthinking, unchallenged racism and patriotism (anti-communism) which these communities [workers] share with the rest of white America.”⁸⁶³ *The Movement* wrote that anti-communism was the heart of radicalism’s problem: “Anti-communism is the strongest force holding a people alienated from their government in support of that government.” *The Movement*’s prescription was to show the American worker “the way people live in Cuba and North Vietnam, in Eastern European countries and in all over the new revolutionary third world countries.” Radicals had to show Americans “the particular way people live in the countries Americans have been taught to hate.”⁸⁶⁴

New Left radical and former Yale professor Staughton Lynd argued after the Mobilization that the “movement” had “redefined itself as a movement against racist capitalist imperialism at home and abroad.” He added: “The question is no longer that American society *has* a problem. What we think now is that American society *is* a problem”⁸⁶⁵ (emphasis is Lynd’s).

While radical protesters focused their dissent on the ideology of containment and its effect on society, other opponents of the war continued to attack the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify military intervention in Vietnam. In a lengthy *New York*

⁸⁶³ The Movement, “We’ve Got To Reach Our Own People,” *The Movement*, November 1967, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 280.

⁸⁶⁴ The Movement, “We’ve Got To Reach Our Own People,” *The Movement*, November 1967, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 285.

⁸⁶⁵ Staughton Lynd, “Resistance; From Mood To Strategy,” *Liberation*, December 1967, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 287.

Times article, former ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith called the Vietnam War a “massive miscalculation—perhaps the worst in history.” He wrote that “proponents of the military solution” misjudged the North Vietnamese’ capacity for reasonable calculation,” believing that the United States had “only to raise sufficiently the cost of the war” to cause North Vietnam to capitulate. Galbraith added that this view “has turned out to be sharply in conflict with circumstances.” Galbraith wrote that it was a misconception that the war was “centrally guided” by a “conspiratorial aspect of Communism.” Galbraith contended, “Since we took this decision, its whole foundation has collapsed.” The heart of Galbraith’s argument was that it was nationalism, not Communism, that drove the conflict. As a result, he wrote, “Our presence in the conflict...further weakens the nationalist identification of the Government of Saigon.” Galbraith claimed that the war was a civil struggle between competing governments. He added: “In much of the country the Vietcong has been the effective governing authority for 10 years or more.” America’s error, he argued, was that it was “quixotic to believe we had an obligation to eliminate Communist Power in all South Vietnam.” This problem was compounded, he added, because “no force can be conscripted to oppose the nationalist instinct of its own people.” Galbraith’s prescription was to “abandon the objective of total reconquest” and accept that “in most of rural South Vietnam we must expect that such central authority as there is will henceforth be exercised by the Vietcong.” Galbraith contended that the United States had been “brain washed” to believe the domino theory, “and rather more by Asians than by our own people.” The solution to the dilemma was to “correct [the] miscalculations” of U.S. policy in Vietnam.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith, “The Galbraith Plan To End the War,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1967, 263, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

Galbraith took a sympathetic tone about the administration's credibility problems, arguing that they were an inevitable consequence of their disastrous policy. The problem, he wrote, was the "highly obdurate nature of facts." The administration was forced to argue that the government in Saigon had "stability" and "democratic instincts," that the South Vietnamese Army had sufficient capability, that military and pacification programs were successful, and that escalation held promise for better results. However, Galbraith wrote, "Time and time again these claims have been denied by events." Galbraith quipped that Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson had just returned "from his eighth consecutive encouraging visit to Vietnam in three and a half years." The consequence of this official optimism, Galbraith wrote, was that "almost anything now said in defense of the war is suspect." Galbraith also joined those who accused the administration of lying about its willingness to negotiate: "If one does not wish to negotiate, he can always do so in a manner that insures [sic] failure." Rather than continue to insist that the fate of the world rested on the outcome of the war in Vietnam, Galbraith suggested, "Both the White House and the State Department would show more respect for the taste and intelligence of the American people if they resorted on occasion to understatement."⁸⁶⁷

While the protests in Washington raged, some members of Congress continued to support the administration's use of the containment of Communism to justify continued U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Republican Senator Wallace F. Bennett of Utah argued that the Vietnam War was actually a battle in a Third World War, waged by the Communist world through wars of liberation, with the goal of world conquest. Bennett cited the positive implications of the domino theory, that U.S. resolve had reversed the Communization of the rest

⁸⁶⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Galbraith Plan To End the War," *New York Times*, 12 November 1967, 263, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009).

of Southeast Asia. Withdrawal before the U.S. had secured South Vietnamese independence “would not only reward Communist aggression, and confirm the effectiveness of their so-called wars of liberation,” Bennett argued, “but would inevitably encourage further Communist military adventures elsewhere.”⁸⁶⁸ Maryland Democratic Senator Daniel B. Brewster agreed that U.S. intervention in Vietnam was required to contain Communism, but insisted on the floor of the Senate that the administration needed to take more aggressive action in Vietnam.⁸⁶⁹

Despite these expressions of support from members of Congress, many in Congress continued to oppose the war. Brewster’s fellow Senator from Maryland, Democrat Joseph D. Tydings, protested against the “continuous escalation” of the conflict.⁸⁷⁰ Senator J. William Fulbright took to the floor of the Senate to urge his colleagues to support a sense of the Senate resolution sponsored by Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield of Montana asking the United Nations to intervene to resolve what Fulbright called the “revolting and degrading” war in Vietnam. This resolution attracted 59 cosponsors. Fulbright added: “In this open-ended and frustrating and divisive war the United States has no choice but to seek a settlement.” But the heart of Fulbright’s critique was an attack on the application of the ideology of containment to the conflict, which Fulbright said had “raised [the war] from a guerrilla war to an

⁸⁶⁸ Walter Trohan, “Bennett Analyzes War in Vietnam,” Washington, DC, *Chicago Tribune* Press Service, *Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, WA, 26 October 1967, 4.

⁸⁶⁹ Washington Post, “Brewster Backs LBJ Viet Stand,” *Washington Post*, 26 October 1967, box 73 [2 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 Materials sent from John P. Roche, May 19, 1968-Vietnam, Committee to Support Administration Position, Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁸⁷⁰ Washington Post, “Brewster Backs LBJ Viet Stand,” *Washington Post*, 26 October 1967, box 73 [2 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 Materials sent from John P. Roche, May 19, 1968-Vietnam, Committee to Support Administration Position, Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

internationalized war.” Democratic Senators Phillip A. Hart of Michigan and Stephen M. Young of Ohio supported this move by Fulbright.⁸⁷¹

As the Mobilization and its critics receded from the headlines some Presidential hopefuls also began to speak out against the use of containment to justify the war. In November 1967, Republican Governor George Romney of Michigan reversed his earlier support for the war, claiming that he had been “brainwashed” by military briefings on the war and claiming that the war was in fact a “tragic mistake.” His criticism was that, as the war and pacification efforts were “Americanized,” the South Vietnamese did less to secure their own freedom. Further, he argued that the escalation had exacerbated the “conflict that now exists between Communism and freedom.” Romney did accept that the war was being directed by North Vietnamese and Chinese Communists. However, Romney dissented on the domino theory, believing that the United States had, in fact, created the conditions under which the domino theory might play out when it “built this thing [Vietnam] up” into a major confrontation. Still, Romney believed it was “unthinkable that the United States should withdraw,” though, confusingly, he also said that the war could not be won “by bombing and military action.” Ultimately, the core of Romney’s dissent was what he claimed was a fundamental difference between Democrats and Republicans. Democratic Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Romney claimed, were responsible for the United States’ “entrapment” in Vietnam. By contrast, Romney said, “We must acknowledge the wisdom of President Eisenhower’s decision 13 years ago not to deploy ground troops in

⁸⁷¹ United Press International, “UPI-135 (U.N.),” Washington, DC, United Press International, 30 November 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Vietnam.”⁸⁷² Of course, this analysis ignored the fact that, since at least 1965, the consistent Republican position had been that the war should be escalated more than the Johnson administration had chosen to escalate it.

Romney’s policy prescription was to give the National Liberation Front a seat at negotiations in hope of splitting nationalists and Communists within their movement. Romney indicated he would accept neutralization of Southeast Asia. Romney also proposed the vague outlines of a broader foreign policy philosophy, a more restrained form of military containment. Romney claimed that the United States risked becoming exhausted “running around on a bucket brigade trying to put out every fire that comes along.” His thresholds for intervention were whether the prospective situation was a “genuine threat to the balance of world peace...and [had an]...absence of local resources to meet that threat.”⁸⁷³ In the end, this early Republican presidential hopeful would prove an ineffective campaigner and leave the race by February 1968.

The 1968 Fulbright Hearings

In late 1967, Senator J. William Fulbright made the fateful decision to change his strategy for changing the administration’s policies in Vietnam. Since mid-1965, Fulbright had attacked the administration’s use of containment to justify the war as well as the broader ideology of military containment of Communism itself. Fulbright and his staff had reached the conclusion by late 1967 that these attacks had not only failed to persuade Congress or the American public to oppose the war, they had actually alienated the American public. Instead, Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee decided to attack the credibility of the administration’s

⁸⁷² Richard Hughes, “Romney’s Stand May Be War Issue,” Lansing, MI, United Press International, *Times-News*, Hendersonville, NC, 30 November 1967, 16.

⁸⁷³ Richard Hughes, “Romney View on Viet War Told,” Lansing, MI, United Press International, *Press-Courier*, Oxnard, CA, 3 December 1967, 24.

account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in order to undermine the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—the administration’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—in a more narrow effort to force the President to end the war.

Fulbright’s decision to hold hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident reignited older attacks on the President’s credibility, such as attacks on his true willingness to negotiate an end to the war. While some of the President’s supporters defended his credibility, the administration largely continued to doggedly insist that containment of Communism in Southeast Asia required U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. In late 1967, the President upped the ante, raising public expectations of success in Vietnam by recalling General Westmoreland to once more tout America’s successes in Vietnam.

What they in fact did, however, was end the Johnson Presidency itself. Then, in January 1968, just before the Fulbright Committee’s attack on the Gulf of Tonkin incident came to fruition, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong called into question the administration’s optimistic claims of progress from late 1967 by prosecuting a dramatic nationwide offensive, the Tet Offensive. By February 1968, when the Fulbright hearings offered the American people new evidence that the President had lied about the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the President’s credibility finally and completely collapsed. In the face of a bitter and desperate primary battle, Johnson withdrew from the Presidential race.

Senator J. William Fulbright’s decision to hold hearings in 1968 was the result of the convergence of a number of factors, including the efforts by other Members of Congress to end the war, the White House’s increasing use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent, and the failure of Fulbright’s previous dissent—attacking the containment

of Communism and its applicability to the war in Vietnam—to change Johnson’s policy in Vietnam.

In August 1967, Republican Congressman Paul Findley, an opponent of the war, appeared on a television panel on KMOX in St. Louis to discuss Vietnam with prominent St. Louis lawyer Kenneth Teasdale. Teasdale was the husband of the former Anna Fulbright, Senator J. William Fulbright’s daughter.⁸⁷⁴ After the filming concluded the two men discussed a resolution Findley was sponsoring in the House demanding an investigation of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. As a result of this conversation, Findley sent this resolution to Fulbright.⁸⁷⁵

The resolution itself was co-sponsored by 21 other Congressmen. It was introduced but never voted on by the full House. The resolution began with a complaint about how the war was being executed, as “a war of gradualism which has not caused the Communist forces in South Vietnam to respect the territorial integrity of that country.” It charged that the United States had done nothing to stem the flow of North Vietnamese supplies, that the South Vietnamese Army was ineffectual, that the Marines were besieged at Khe Sanh, and that “there [was] no indication that the military and political activities of the United States since 1964 have in any way brought a settlement closer.”⁸⁷⁶ But its main complaint was to question the validity of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution:

⁸⁷⁴ Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University, 1995), 49.

⁸⁷⁵ Paul Findley [Congressman], letter to J. William Fulbright accompanying a draft resolution demanding investigation of Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Washington, DC, 15 August 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁷⁶ Paul Findley [Congressman], H. RES. 869, proposed resolution demanding investigation of Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US House of Representatives, Washington, DC, 10 August 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Substantial doubt exists among Members of Congress and the American public as to whether the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of August 1964...provides adequate authority to the President to deal with the military situation in Southeast Asia.⁸⁷⁷

This resolution demanded that the House Committee on Foreign Affairs hold hearings on “the implementation of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution...and...consider whether it empowers the President to carry forward military operations of the current scope and magnitude in Southeast Asia.” This resolution also suggested that the Resolution might need “modification in light of changing political and military conditions.”⁸⁷⁸ This was substantially the same aim that Fulbright had sought but failed to achieve at the end of his hearings in 1966.

At the same time that Fulbright received a copy of this House resolution from Findley, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was beginning hearings to consider Senate Resolution 151, a resolution to reassert the role of the Congress in advice and consent on foreign policy.⁸⁷⁹ The chief complaint of this resolution was that the “accurate definition of the term ‘national commitment’ in recent years has become obscured.” This resolution simply reasserted that national commitments could only be enacted jointly by the executive and legislative branch through “a treaty, convention, or other legislative instrumentality specifically intended to give

⁸⁷⁷ Paul Findley [Congressman], H. RES. 869, proposed resolution demanding investigation of Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US House of Representatives, Washington, DC, 10 August 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁷⁸ Paul Findley [Congressman], H. RES. 869, proposed resolution demanding investigation of Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US House of Representatives, Washington, DC, 10 August 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁷⁹ William Conrad Gibbons, *The U. S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships: July 1965-January 1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1995), 810-811.

effect to such a commitment.”⁸⁸⁰ This resolution was relatively tepid in comparison to the House’s resolution on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

In September 1967, former judge and constitutional scholar Dr. Albert Levitt testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the National Commitments Resolution and insisted that the entire legal basis on which the President was waging the war in Vietnam—including the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—was invalid.⁸⁸¹ Unfortunately for the Congressional antiwar bloc, the limited scope of the National Commitments Resolution being considered in the Senate would do nothing to bind the President or amend or repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In fact, in August 1967, historian W. Stull Holt testified before the Committee that the resolution would have no effect on the President at all.⁸⁸² Fulbright persisted in trying to refine and tailor this resolution to tie the President’s hands in making future commitments. However, as he tried to modify the resolution, he was met with opposition from his colleagues—even inside the Foreign Relations Committee—and was forced to exempt both the Vietnam War and emergency situations from the effects of the resolution, effectively stripping the resolution of the power he had initially intended it to wield—to weaken the President’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Fulbright was then forced to delay further

⁸⁸⁰ Albert Levitt [judge], “STATEMENT OF ALBERT LEVITT OF HANCOCK, N. H. before the SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS on SENATE RESOLUTION 151,” 19 September 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸¹ Albert Levitt [judge], “STATEMENT OF ALBERT LEVITT OF HANCOCK, N. H. before the SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS on SENATE RESOLUTION 151,” 19 September 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸² New York Times, “Expert Says LBJ Can Ignore Senate,” Washington, D.C., New York Times News Service, *Miami News*, 24 August 1967, 9A

consideration of the resolution until 1968.⁸⁸³ Fulbright succeeded in getting the findings of the hearings on the Resolution published in the *New York Times*.⁸⁸⁴ However, in the end this resolution was not even voted by the full Senate until 1969. And this effort did nothing to call into question the President's authority to wage the war or weaken the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Just as this effort was falling apart, the administration began to ever more forcefully invoke the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent, beginning with the President's speech in San Antonio in September 1967.

Discussions amongst Fulbright and the staffers of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee make it clear that the Committee was searching for a way to inflict political damage on President Johnson in hopes of getting him to change course in Vietnam. In December, as the Committee discussed how to move forward with hearings, discussions proceeded on two tracks. The first possible hearing subject was on the "responsibilities of the United States" as a world power. This subject had been entertained as a possible hearing topic since late 1966, but had only produced a few isolated hearings. Carl Marcy suggested that these hearings be retooled to be "frankly political (hopefully with educational side effects)." To achieve this goal, Marcy suggested inviting a list of 1968 Presidential hopefuls—including former Vice President Richard Nixon, Senator Eugene McCarthy, and Governor George Romney—to testify. Marcy suggested that this be followed by the "broad educational (really political) act of hearings" with opponents

⁸⁸³ United Press International, "UPI-94," wire service story about Congressional resolution on the use of force, 16 November 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 5, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸⁴ J. William Fulbright, letter to Philip W. Quigg [managing editor, *Foreign Affairs*] about Senate Foreign Relations Committee report on "national commitments", US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 5 December 1966, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

of the administration's policies in Vietnam "such as Kahin, Kennan, Shoup, [Ridgway], and returned veterans."⁸⁸⁵ In a later conception of this series of hearings, the witness list was even more confrontational, including Governor Ronald Reagan and Johnson nemesis Senator Robert F. Kennedy.⁸⁸⁶ Staffer Norvill Jones agreed with Carl Marcy's proposed hearings.⁸⁸⁷

However, staffers Don Henderson and Bill Bader disagreed with Carl Marcy. They wanted to hold hearings on the specific topic of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁸⁸⁸ In late 1967, probably in response to the Associated Press' July 1967 article questioning the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Fulbright had ordered staffer Bill Bader to begin an investigation of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁸⁸⁹ As a result of this investigation, Bader had amassed a large amount of evidence and witness testimony calling into question the administration's account of the incident. Henderson argued that the previous year's abortive attempt to hold hearings on America's role as a world power had had "mediocre results and minor impact precisely because their theme was so large

⁸⁸⁵ Carl Marcy, letter to Senator J. William Fulbright about potential topics and intent of hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1968, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 15 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸⁶ Carl Marcy, "Educational Hearings for 1968," memorandum for Senator J. William Fulbright about potential hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on US as a world power, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 13 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸⁷ Norvill Jones, memorandum for Carl Marcy about proposed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on US as a world power, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 14 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸⁸ Carl Marcy, letter to Senator J. William Fulbright about potential topics and intent of hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1968, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 15 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁸⁹ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 138, 166-7.

and almost amorphous in the eyes of the general public.” He suggested that the problem with these hearings was that “growing dissension in this country has gone beyond the point of encouraging dispassionate and impartial examination of alternative ways of viewing the world and the United States role.” Henderson also suggested that, since 1968 was an election year, bringing presidential candidates to testify might “split [the Committee] beyond retrieval and damage its effectiveness as an alternate voice to that of the Administration” and also “damage rather than help presidential candidates.” Instead, Henderson suggested, “Greater impact would be gained by less generalization and more concrete information” and, for that reason, “Tonkin Gulf hearings would be made to order.” Referring to Bill Bader’s preliminary staff study about the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Henderson added, “I think we already have the [ammunition] prepared for dramatic hearings early next session.” Henderson concluded that the Committee’s role was “to restrain the Administration and the military by demonstrating their deficiencies and by trying to examine concrete alternatives to what they are doing” and, while “it would be most desirable if these latter could be developed out of a broad alternative framework of policy thinking,” Henderson didn’t “believe the situation or the nation will stand still for the process.”⁸⁹⁰

Staffer Peter Riddleberger joined Don Henderson in rejecting the idea of hearings on the role of the United States as a world power. He wrote to Senator Fulbright, “These types of hearings are appealing to a narrowing group of Americans, namely the ‘new left’ and the academic community.” Riddleberger observed that these groups had already alienated the

⁸⁹⁰ Don Henderson, memorandum for Carl Marcy disagreeing with proposed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on US as a world power, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 14 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

American public and, in identifying itself with these dissenters, the Committee might unintentionally help the President. To prove his point, Riddleberger even attached the recent article from the *Washington Post* by pollster Louis Harris about the American public's growing animosity towards radical demonstrators who were attacking the Cold War consensus. Next, Riddleberger cited the growing volume of Americans writing letters to the Committee that criticized the Senator's past critiques of the President.⁸⁹¹ Riddleberger suggested that the Committee stop attacking the Cold War consensus and instead focus on the President's credibility.

While there is no direct documentary evidence, in light of the administration's increasingly aggressive invocation of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent, Fulbright's repeated failed attempts to weaken the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in the past, and Fulbright's recent correspondence with Congressman Paul Findley about his own Tonkin Gulf Resolution hearings, hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident must have appealed to Senator Fulbright as a way to weaken the administration's insurance policy against Congressional dissent, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Within a week of this letter, Senator Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had decided to hold its hearings in early 1968 on the Gulf of Tonkin incident. And it was clear from the first steps that the Committee took in this direction that its targets were the President's credibility and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. On 21 December 1967, Senator Fulbright made a statement about the release of previously classified testimony by Assistant

⁸⁹¹ Peter Riddleberger [staffer, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations], memorandum for Carl Marcy disagreeing with proposed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on US as a world power, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 19 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Secretary of State William P. Bundy that confirmed that the administration had written a draft of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution before the Gulf of Tonkin incident ever occurred. The press release actually quoted the relevant testimony. Bundy stunned Senator Fulbright by saying, “We had contingent drafts...for some time prior to that.” Fulbright responded incredulously, “What do you mean, prior to when?” Bundy answered, “Prior to August 1964.” Bundy quickly tried to cover his mistake: “But this is a matter of normal contingency planning. No serious thought had been given to it, to the best of my knowledge, prior to the Gulf of Tonkin.” But Fulbright pressed, asking what the purpose of the draft was “if it occurred before that [the incident]?” Bundy only made matters worse with his response: “We had always anticipated...the possibility that things might take [a] more drastic turn at any time and that it would be wise to seek an affirmation of the desires of and intent of the Congress.”⁸⁹² Fulbright had launched a direct assault on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, and the Gulf of Tonkin incident was the weapon he would use to fight the President.

This press release generated a great deal of media attention, with many news sources drawing the conclusion that the Gulf of Tonkin incident had been a pretext for action the administration had wanted to take all along. Some media sources also, for the first time, echoed the accusations made by the Associated Press in July 1967 that the attack on the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on the night of 4 August 1964 had never happened. For instance, a United Press International story about the press release, carried in papers across the country, reported that

⁸⁹² US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “STATEMENT BY SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT, CHAIRMAN, SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE,” press release about release of William P. Bundy’s statement about Tonkin Gulf Resolution from September 1966, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, [21 December 1967], in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

“certain statements recently have indicated that torpedoes may not have been fired at the U.S. vessels.”⁸⁹³

The Committee followed with an official announcement that it would hold hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident. It received a number of letters supporting this decision. The Committee also received a number of letters from people with information about the event that was indeed helpful in the hearings.⁸⁹⁴

At the same time as this new threat to the President was taking shape in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the President had recalled General William C. Westmoreland to the United States to buoy sagging American spirits and shore up public approval of his policies in Vietnam. In a press conference on 22 November 1967 at the Pentagon, Westmoreland boasted that the Viet Cong was forced to buy Cambodian rice because U.S. military forces had blocked its supply routes from the north.⁸⁹⁵ In a National Press Club speech, Westmoreland was optimistic about the future, telling the audience that the United States was entering a new phase in the war “when the end begins to come into view.” He said that during this phase, the Viet Cong would be “cut up and near collapse” while the South Vietnamese Army would become more professional and more competent in facing Viet Cong forces.⁸⁹⁶ He predicted that troop

⁸⁹³ United Press International, “TUPI-68 (TONKIN),” wire news release, Washington, DC, United Press International, 21 December 1967, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 5, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁹⁴ Carl Marcy, memorandum for Senator J. William Fulbright about recent mail volume and subjects, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 16 January 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁸⁹⁵ United Press International, “Bombs May Force Reds to Increase Use of Cambodia,” United Press International, Washington, D.C., *Bulletin*, Bend, Oregon, 24 November 1967, 12.

⁸⁹⁶ Reuter, “U.S. about to enter new phase of war,” Reuter, Washington, D.C., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 1967, 2.

reductions in South Vietnam would begin within two years. Westmoreland also announced a new military strategy, saying that the United States would begin to “provide new military equipment to revitalize the Vietnamese army and prepare them to take on an ever-increasing share of the war.”⁸⁹⁷ Westmoreland promised that bases would progressively be handed over to South Vietnamese forces and that “the Vietnamese will take charge of the final mopping-up of the Vietcong, a task which will probably last several years.”⁸⁹⁸ Westmoreland also said that the stockpiling of logistics for the war in South Vietnam was complete—meaning more equipment would not be sent to Vietnam.⁸⁹⁹

Americans seemed preconditioned by similar statements by Westmoreland and General Harold K. Johnson earlier in the summer to believe this rosy assessment. By mid-November, for the first time in over a year, a clear majority (55 percent) of Americans who had an opinion believed that the “United States and its allies are...making progress” in Vietnam.⁹⁰⁰ Moreover, while Americans were by December evenly split on whether the United States “made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam,”⁹⁰¹ 60 percent of Americans who had an opinion identified

⁸⁹⁷ United Press International, “U.S. plans to strengthen weapon supply to S. Vietnam,” United Press International, Washington, D.C., *Bulletin*, Bend, Oregon, 24 November 1967, 12.

⁸⁹⁸ Reuter, “U.S. about to enter new phase of war,” Reuter, Washington, D.C., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 1967, 2.

⁸⁹⁹ Associated Press, “Pentagon Eyes Reduction of War Surplus,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Morning Record*, Meriden, CT, 25 November 1967, 7.

⁹⁰⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0754: Politics/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 16-21 November 1967), 6.

⁹⁰¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0755: Economy/Presidential Election/Vietnam/Most Admired People* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 December 1967), 9.

themselves as “hawk[s]” when the term was defined as those who “want to step up our military effort in Vietnam.”⁹⁰²

The administration intended this speech to bolster public approval of the President’s policies in Vietnam. Instead, it served only to compound the administration’s error from late summer 1967, when both General Westmorland and General Johnson made a number of optimistic projections about progress in Vietnam. In particular, Westmoreland made a number of claims about the ineffectiveness of the Vietcong. He said the Viet Cong was losing its grip on and credibility with the population. Westmoreland also claimed the Viet Cong was no longer able to extract taxes or recruits from the people of South Vietnam, forcing North Vietnam to “plug the gap.” Westmoreland dismissed the massive North Vietnamese offensive against Marines at Khe Sanh as a failed attempt to overshadow the inauguration of the new South Vietnamese president.⁹⁰³ The timing of these optimistic assessments could not have been worse; in just two months, the Viet Cong would dramatically demonstrate that it had plenty of fight left in it.

The administration also probably intended to improve public approval of its policies in Vietnam with its next move. On 29 November 1967, the administration announced the resignation of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, with an effective date early in 1968.⁹⁰⁴ In part, this move was made to counter the growing influence of Johnson’s political rival presidential contender Robert F. Kennedy, over the Secretary.⁹⁰⁵ However, McNamara had also

⁹⁰² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0755: Economy/Presidential Election/Vietnam/Most Admired People* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 December 1967), 18.

⁹⁰³ Reuter, “U.S. about to enter new phase of war,” Reuter, Washington, D.C., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 1967, 2.

⁹⁰⁴ Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1988), 118.

⁹⁰⁵ A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 462-465.

recently expressed very serious doubts about the American course in Vietnam, suggesting to the President that he stop the escalation of troop numbers in Vietnam and initiate a unilateral bombing halt (a course the President would actually adopt five months later).⁹⁰⁶ In an oral history from 1975, McNamara himself admitted that this might have “advanced the time of my departure by a few months.”⁹⁰⁷

Otherwise, the President’s response to the deepening threat to his credibility was to—ever more acrimoniously—insist that U.S. military intervention in Vietnam was required to contain Communism. In an interview with Dan Rather and Frank Reynolds for CBS News, Johnson lashed out at those critics who demanded a bombing halt. Johnson began by reiterating his claim that the Vietnam War was a war against Communist aggression. He said the United States had to continue to fight until it was “obvious to North Vietnam and all of those supporting North Vietnam that we are not going to cut and run, that South Vietnam is not going to be a prize for them to gain.” Johnson added that the future of South Vietnam was “up to the people of South Vietnam. Not to North Vietnam or not to China or the Soviets or the United States.” The President then attacked the idea of a unilateral bombing halt: “We’re not going to be so soft-headed, so puddin’-headed as to say we’ll stop our half of the war and hope and pray that they stop theirs.” In some respect, this was a defense of his credibility on his desire to negotiate. Yet it was also an attack on dissenters; Johnson implied that opponents of the war were giving the Communists a hope of victory—the first time the President himself had made this charge; “They [the Communists] think that if they are firm,” Johnson said, “. . .they will develop enough

⁹⁰⁶ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University, 493-496.

⁹⁰⁷ Transcript, Robert S. McNamara Oral History Interview I, 1 January 1975, by Walt W. Rostow, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 58.

sympathy and understanding in this country, and hatred for the war in this country that their will will outlast our will.”⁹⁰⁸

Administration supporters also reasserted the ideology of containment to justify the war. Syndicated columnist Roscoe Drummond argued that, as a result of the United States stand in South Vietnam, “the whole arc in the Western Pacific from Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan to Australia and New Zealand is accomplishing an economic development of great promise.” Drummond touted the ouster of Sukarno from Indonesia as a direct result of the United States’ “checking Communist expansion-by-force at the Vietnamese gate.” He called this phenomenon “the domino theory in reverse,” adding, “As it becomes evident that we are staying in Vietnam, the ‘dominoes,’ which were teetering, are beginning to stand more firmly on their feet.” While he wrote that the domino theory was “perhaps oversimplified as a phrase,” he still echoed its precepts, writing that “nearly all the political leaders of Southeast Asia affirm that the security of their nation rests in large part on our success in defending South Vietnam.” Drummond also echoed the administration’s argument that it was continuing its predecessors’ policies, writing, “President Eisenhower, President Kennedy and President Johnson all explicitly concluded that the safety and independence of all Southeast Asia were at stake in the U.S. defense of South Vietnam.”⁹⁰⁹

This administration’s fiery counterattack against the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s impending hearings, along with the extreme optimism of General Westmoreland, had a noticeable positive effect on public opinion. The gap between those who disapproved and

⁹⁰⁸ Dan Rather, Frank Reynolds, Lyndon B. Johnson, “Presiden [sic] Johnson interview with network correspondents,” raw footage (poor quality), 18 December 1967, Video #VTR 100, “LBJ Interview with network correspondents,” Motion Pictures, Audiovisual Materials, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹⁰⁹ Roscoe Drummond, “Gains Are Being Made In The Western Pacific Area,” Washington, DC, Publishers-Hall Syndicate, *Observer-Reporter*, Washington, PA, 12 December 1967, 4.

those who approved of the President's handling of Vietnam narrowed noticeably, with 46 percent disapproving (a drop of three percentage points from November) and 40 percent approving.

Where many Americans did disapprove, they probably disapproved because the President was not being aggressive enough; over two thirds of Americans now identified themselves as "hawk[s]," wanting "to step up our military effort in Vietnam."⁹¹⁰

The publicity raised by the impending Fulbright Hearings presented an opportunity for the Associated Press to republish its report on the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which had been virtually ignored in July 1967. This December 1967 follow-up article by Harry Rosenthal was largely the same report published in July. However, it did include new information, like a report from former Navy Lieutenant John White that, on the night of 4 August, the two destroyers were sending "confusing radio messages" to each other indicating that the crews themselves "were not certain they were being attacked." The report also quoted Ensign Richard Corsette, who said it was his "firm belief" that every contact he detected "was weather."⁹¹¹

The approach of the Fulbright hearings, and the new questions about President Johnson's credibility caused some supporters of the administration in the media to begin equivocating. John Chamberlain had staunchly supported the administration's use of the containment of Communism to justify military intervention in Vietnam for three years. In January 1968, he still tepidly supported the administration's argument that it was continuing "commitments that date back even to Eisenhower days" but then launched into an assault on the administration's

⁹¹⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0756: 1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 4-9 January 1968), 14.

⁹¹¹ Harry F. Rosenthal, "Tonkin Gulf Again in News; Doubts May Stir Inquiry," Washington, DC, Associate Press, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 24 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

credibility on its “fiscal irresponsibility.” Citing arguments from Eliot Janeway’s book, *The Economics of Crisis*, Chamberlain attacked outgoing Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who, Janeway claimed, “failed in 1966 to keep the Treasury—and, presumably, the White House itself—continuously informed of the rate of increase in war spending.” But this problem was also a result of what Chamberlain cited Janeway as calling a “secret plan of war escalation in Vietnam” and a “refusal to make timely and continuous disclosure of his war plans to Congress.”⁹¹²

Lester Markel, generally a supporter of the war, wrote an article for the *New York Times* that echoed the administration’s use of ideology of military containment to justify the war. But Markel was critical, almost pitying, of Johnson’s inability to be believed. Markel, after an interview with Johnson, wrote that the private President Johnson was very believable, but “the public Johnson is the convivial but not quite convincing Texan.” People didn’t believe Johnson, Markel added, “because Mr. Johnson has achieved many of his ends by manipulation and, even though such maneuvers may be in the best causes, it is difficult for him to shed the habit.”⁹¹³

The impending hearings on the credibility of the administration’s account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident also reinvigorated older attacks on Presidential credibility, namely accusations that the President did not truly want negotiations as he claimed. In a political cartoon by Paul Conrad, Lyndon Johnson is shown at a podium, presumably saying he wants peace, while

⁹¹² John Chamberlain, “War Financing May Trip LBJ,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, St. Joseph, MO, 4 January 1968, 4.

⁹¹³ Lester Markel, “How the No. 1 Power Should Use Its Power,” *New York Times*, 14 January 1968, SM22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993).

kicking behind a curtain signals such as a stop sign, an olive branch, and a phone call from Hanoi. The caption reads: “We are waiting for a signal from Hanoi.”⁹¹⁴

The President remained out of the debate over his credibility, instead continuing to use the ideology of containment to justify the war. In his 1968 State of the Union Address, the President joked about growing Congressional dissent, saying that, as he walked into the House chamber, he remembered “what Sam Rayburn told me many years ago: The Congress always extends a very warm welcome to the President—as he comes in.” The President then launched into a defense of the progress in Vietnam, citing recent elections. The President also revived his argument about positive consequences of the domino theory, arguing that, “in Asia, the nations from Korea and Japan to Indonesia and Singapore worked behind America’s shield to strengthen their economies and to broaden their political cooperation.” Still, the President warned that “the enemy continues to pour men and material across frontiers and into battle.” Attacking dissenters, the President said that the North Vietnamese “hope that America’s will to persevere can be broken.” The President insisted: “Aggression will never prevail.”⁹¹⁵

In NBC’s coverage of the President’s State of the Union Address, David Brinkley also lashed out at dissenters who he claimed were taking “a great partisan political pleasure in ridiculing his [the President’s] failures.” Brinkley attacked the “many half-grown protesters and many half-educated academics” who he said liked to “prance around jeering and ridiculing and making funny noises and carrying funny signs in neurotic displays that tell more about the

⁹¹⁴ Paul Conrad, “‘We Are Waiting For A Signal From Hanoi,’” (political cartoon), Register and Tribune Syndicate, *Los Angeles Times*, *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, Lewiston, ID, 11 January 1968, 4.

⁹¹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 17, 1968,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-69*. Volume I, entry 14 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 25-33, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1968-january-1969/01-17-1968.html>.

protesters than about what they're protesting." Brinkley added that it was "no doubt...a lot of fun to pour scorn on the president and to wallow in a warm tub of self-righteousness, but no one has shown clearly how that helps." Brinkley concluded by warning: "It is fairly easy to destroy a President, but it is also possible to destroy the system along with him. And if the system goes, the right to dissent goes with it."⁹¹⁶

While the administration did not defend its own credibility, many of its supporters did. Another NBC segment covering the 1968 State of the Union Address featured former Senator Paul Douglas in an interview with reporter Robert Goralski. Paul Douglas was the chairman of an organization called the Citizens' Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam—which also included former President Eisenhower and Gen. (ret.) Omar Bradley among others—which had been actively defending the administration's use of containment to justify the Vietnam War since mid-1967.⁹¹⁷ In this interview, however, Douglas defended the President's credibility on the subject of negotiations. Douglas argued that North Vietnam demanded an end to the bombing of the north, but didn't "pledge themselves to anything." Douglas compared this non-offer to what he claimed were duplicitous negotiating techniques by North Korea: "We called off our attacks when we had the Commies on the run to go into conference with them...they talked for two years. During that time, the Communists continued to attack and caused many thousands of casualties." Douglas insisted that this was part of a Communist strategy to outlast the United

⁹¹⁶ NBC, "The President's Message: A Troubled year Ahead/Analysis of the State of Union Address," *NBC Special Report*, 17 January 1968, 1 hour, black and white with sound, Video #VTR126 "Analysis of State of the Union with Galbraith and Lindsay," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹¹⁷ Special Committee on Bombing Policy of the Citizen's Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, "A BALANCE SHEET ON BOMBING," Citizen's Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, box 73 [2 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 Materials sent from John P. Roche, May 19, 1968-Vietnam, Committee to Support Administration Position, Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

States: “The Communist world thinks that they can gradually force us to call off our military action.” Douglas concluded by reiterating the administration’s argument that the war was for “the defense of American interests and the preservation of world peace.”⁹¹⁸

As the 1968 Fulbright Hearings approached, supporters of the administration’s policies in Vietnam confronted Senator Fulbright on *Meet the Press*. Peter Lisagor from the *Chicago Daily News* asked whether the hearings were simply “an effort to discredit the administration.” Fulbright deflected the question, saying many witnesses had “voluntarily written” or made “personal calls.” Fulbright argued the Committee would be “derelict in [its] duty” if it did not investigate. Lisagor pressed, asking why not investigate the attack on Pleiku in 1965 instead since this actually initiated continuous bombing. At this question, Fulbright again made clear that his real target was to attack the President’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. He explained that the Committee had a “special responsibility” to investigate the circumstances surrounding the Resolution since his Committee had “acted unanimously” to press it forward in the Senate. He added that it was also important because, “in the words of the attorney general, now the Undersecretary of State, this was the equivalent—the functional equivalent—of a declaration of war.” But the heart of Fulbright’s critique was now the administration’s credibility. He said: “The administration talks one way and acts another.”⁹¹⁹

⁹¹⁸ NBC, “The President’s Message: A Troubled year Ahead/Analysis of the State of Union Address,” *NBC Special Report*, 17 January 1968, 1 hour, black and white with sound, Video #VTR126 “Analysis of State of the Union with Galbraith and Lindsay,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹¹⁹ Edwin Newman (host), Lawrence E. Spivak, Max Frankel (*New York Times*), Peter Lisagor (*Chicago Daily News*), Charles Murphy (NBC News), Sen. J. William Fulbright, *Meet the Press*, 21 January 1968, Color with sound, Video # VTR130, “*Meet the Press/CBS Special Report Vietnam Peace Talks*,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

On 23 January 1968, North Koreans boarded and captured the *U.S.S. Pueblo* off of the coast of North Korea. The ship was conducting a surveillance mission and travelling well inside the 15-mile limit claimed by the North Koreans as their international waters—circumstances eerily similar to the circumstances of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁹²⁰

Opponents of the war saw the *Pueblo* incident as an opportunity. In early February 1968, historian Henry Steele Commager suggested in a private letter to Senator Fulbright that he highlight the “parallel—and contrast” between the Tonkin Gulf and the *Pueblo* affair taking shape in North Korea.⁹²¹ In his response, Fulbright wrote that he had already decided to highlight the similarities and differences between the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the *Pueblo* affair. However, he also made it clear that his real target was not just the Gulf of Tonkin incident but the President’s credibility. He wrote: “It is quite clear that the affair of the *Maddox* was not as represented to the public but proving it is another matter.” He added, “The credibility gap, has become so much a way of life that I am not sure the people of this country will care even if I prove that the affair of the *Maddox* was a fraud.” But he promised to try.⁹²²

⁹²⁰ George H. Aldrich, “QUESTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW RAISED BY THE SEIZURE OF THE U.S.S. *PUEBLO*,” *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at Its Annual Meeting (1921-1969)*, American Society of International Law, Vol. 63, Perspectives for International Legal Development (APRIL 24-26, 1969), 2-6.

⁹²¹ Henry Steele Commager [Professor, Amherst College, MA], letter to Senator J. William Fulbright about the similarities between the USS *Pueblo* and USS *Maddox* incidents, 6 February, 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1966-1967, Box 8, Folder 5, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹²² J. William Fulbright, letter of response to Henry Steele Commager [Professor, Amherst College, MA] about his letter comparing the USS *Pueblo* and USS *Maddox* incidents, 10 February, 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

The Tet Offensive

In the early morning hours of 31 January 1968, North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong forces stunned the U.S. and South Vietnamese militaries by breaking the Tet cease-fire and striking over a hundred different locations simultaneously. Around 67,000 enemy troops would eventually be committed to the effort (against nearly 1.1 million U.S. and South Vietnamese troops).⁹²³ The targets of the offensive stunned the American people as well. Three NVA divisions and around 3,000 Viet Cong “irregulars” actually penetrated the heart of the American presence in Vietnam: Saigon. Sappers even breached and, for a few minutes, threatened to overtake U.S. forces at the American embassy itself.⁹²⁴

The Tet Offensive was most important to the public debate over the Vietnam War because it called into question the credibility of the administration’s overly optimistic claims of success and predictions for the future of Vietnam from summer and fall 1967. The Tet Offensive both undermined Johnson’s credibility and increased the American public’s demands for more aggressive action in Vietnam. However, rather than defend his credibility or explain to “Hawks” why he could not escalate the conflict further, the President continued to stubbornly use containment to justify the war. Had this been the final blow to President Johnson’s credibility, his policies in Vietnam might have survived the Tet Offensive. However, coming as it did just before the 1968 Fulbright hearings, the Tet Offensive set the stage for the final collapse of Johnson’s credibility and his Presidency

The significant developments in the initial hours of the offensive on Tet suddenly focused the attention of the American public on Vietnam. General Westmoreland used that focus,

⁹²³ Don Oberdorfer. *Tet!* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1971), 246-251

⁹²⁴ Robert Pisor. *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh*. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), 170-177.

immediately following the attack on the embassy, to present an upbeat assessment of the way U.S. and Army of the Republic of Vietnam forces had met the challenge from the embassy grounds. This assessment initially dominated the headlines but generated public skepticism when contrasted with the pictures of the violence inside the embassy.⁹²⁵

Television coverage of the Tet Offensive, transmitted into millions of American households every night, had a powerful psychological impact on the American people.⁹²⁶ The Associated Press' Peter Arnett's coverage of the siege of the U.S. embassy in Saigon and his erroneous initial report that the Communists had seized part of the embassy, was repeated on news broadcasts and in newspapers across the United States.⁹²⁷ This AP story also included the notorious comment from a U.S. Army major stating of the town of Ben Tre, "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it."⁹²⁸ Powerful images such as the picture and video of Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a prisoner in the head left an indelible mark on the American psyche.⁹²⁹

The Tet Offensive had an immediate, negative impact on approval of the President's handling of the war, with 54 percent disapproving (a jump of eight points) and only 37 percent approving (a drop of three points) of his handling of the war just a few days after the offensive began. However, the American public's immediate reaction to the offensive was to demand more aggressive action; immediately after the offensive began, 73 percent of Americans identified themselves as "hawk[s]" (a jump of six percentage points). And Americans were in no mood for accommodations to the North Vietnamese to start negotiations; when asked if they

⁹²⁵ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 474; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 539.

⁹²⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 546.

⁹²⁷ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 472-474.

⁹²⁸ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 475.

⁹²⁹ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 475; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 542.

supported a bombing halt to start peace talks, 82 percent of Americans who had an opinion said they wanted the United States to “continue bombing.”⁹³⁰

The Tet Offensive was most damaging to the administration because it called into question the administration’s glowing assessments and predictions from summer and fall 1967. The deluge of bad news from Vietnam overwhelmed optimistic official assessments of the conflict. NBC News special coverage in the first days of the Tet Offensive focused on the contrast between the situation on the ground and the rosier assessments from the White House, the Pentagon, and Military Assistance Command-Vietnam. At one point, footage showed Americans on patrol with Vietnamese policemen. A voiceover by reporter Wilson Hall said: “These U.S. troops and the South Vietnamese policemen are on combat duty—half a block from the U.S. embassy.” This would have been jarring to most Americans, who were used to the city of Saigon being relatively peaceful, a place where U.S. soldiers could walk freely through the streets. After a scene of sniper fire near the embassy, Hall added that these troops now understood “how fanatical and resourceful the Viet Cong are.” Likewise, Sydney Lizzard reported from the studio that the “ferocity of the fighting in Vietnam” was such that “more Americans were killed than in any previous week of the war.”⁹³¹ These statements were a direct contradiction of Westmoreland’s estimates of waning Viet Cong capability and rosy predictions for the future from November 1967.

This coverage also called into question the administration’s credibility about the Tet Offensive itself. According to Robert Guralski, the administration had reported that “nearly

⁹³⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1966- 0757: Crime/Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 2-6 February 1968), 21-22.

⁹³¹ Sydney Lizzard, “Special on Vietnam and Other Current Events,” NBC, recorded from Washington NBC 4, Sunday, 4 February 1968, Video # 0157, “Special Weekend Report on Vietnam,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

15,000 Communists are believed to have lost their lives” compared to fewer than 1,500 U.S. and South Vietnamese casualties. Guralski said that this “gaping disparity between allied and Communist losses has raised doubts on the authenticity of numbers of enemy killed.” The report then cut to an exchange between Robert McNamara and a reporter on *Meet the Press* in which the reporter cornered the Secretary into admitting that these casualty figures came from the South Vietnamese and were not reliable.⁹³²

Democratic Senator Albert Gore, Sr. of Tennessee, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations committee, wasted no time in reminding his colleagues and the American public of the administration’s optimistic predictions for the war from only a few months earlier. Gore noted that “the optimism” of General Westmoreland’s speech at the National Press Club “has now been rendered unreal.” Gore also took aim at the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, saying that “the American people are baffled by the circumstances in which we find ourselves.” He blamed this bafflement on the Congress’ having “entered into a war by inadvertence,” since the Senate had voted on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution with assurances from the White House that it would not be used to start a war in Vietnam. As a result, Gore claimed, the United States’ “moral leadership has been seriously eroded,” the country had a “balance-of-payments problem,” and “dissent at home...has reached such proportions that the country is more seriously threatened with ruinous disruption than at any time since the Civil War.”⁹³³

⁹³² Sydney Lizzard, “Special on Vietnam and Other Current Events,” NBC, recorded from Washington NBC 4, Sunday, 4 February 1968, Video # 0157, “Special Weekend Report on Vietnam,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹³³ US Congress, “PUBLIC TESTIMONY BEFORE THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE,” *Congressional Record—Senate*, US Congress, 7 February 1968, S1071, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

President Johnson's response to this deepening threat to his credibility was to attack dissenters as cowards while continuing to stubbornly insist the war was required to contain of Communism. In a meeting with eleven young war dissenters in the oval office, Johnson told them he understood why they opposed the war: "None of us want to die" (implying their dissent was a result of their fear of going to war). Johnson then insisted—in a very colloquial restatement of the lessons of Munich—"If an aggressor comes on your front porch and runs you off tonight, he'll be back tomorrow and run you out of your bedroom." Johnson also restated the domino theory, claiming that if the United States lost in Vietnam, Thailand "and a good many other countries I won't name" would also be threatened by Communist takeover.⁹³⁴

As the Fulbright Hearings approached, the sense of crisis in America cannot be overemphasized. The staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had received an anonymous but credible tip that experts on the use of nuclear weapons were being moved into Vietnam, and many of the staffers suspected the administration might be contemplating their use at Khe Sanh.⁹³⁵ The American public had similar concerns; Fulbright's office received as many as 150 telegrams in the days before the hearings urging the Senator to do something to prevent the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam.⁹³⁶ The President himself was asked in a press conference

⁹³⁴ Associated Press, "Johnson Offers To Let Foe Set Parley Agenda," Washington, DC, Associated Press, *Blade*, Toledo, OH, 13 February 1968, 1.

⁹³⁵ Carl Marcy, memorandum for Senator J. William Fulbright through staffer Lee Williams about possible use of tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 5 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹³⁶ Carl Marcy, memorandum for Senator J. William Fulbright about public fears of tactical nuclear weapon use in Vietnam, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 14 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

whether he had been asked for authority to use nuclear weapons. When Secretary of State Rusk was pressed on the topic in a letter from Senator Fulbright, he denied that the administration was considering using nuclear weapons but did admit that nuclear expert Professor Richard Garwin had been sent to Vietnam to “discuss technical matters of a non-nuclear nature.”⁹³⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Earle Wheeler made a televised statement that he did not believe these weapons would be needed in Khe Sanh, but he did not rule out their use.⁹³⁸

The Hearings Begin

The subject of the 1968 Fulbright hearings was the administration’s credibility about the Gulf of Tonkin incident. However, Fulbright’s true aim was to invalidate the President’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Both Joseph Bruce Hamilton and Randall Bennett Woods write that Fulbright’s Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings were especially damaging to the President since they began in the early weeks of the Tet Offensive, at a time when the American public had grown impatient with the war.⁹³⁹ However, an examination of the contemporary press before and after the hearings alongside public opinion polls shows that the hearings were more damaging because they reinforced a public perception that the administration was lying about the war and had been for

⁹³⁷ Dean Rusk, letter to Senator J. William Fulbright about potential use of tactical nuclear weapon in Vietnam, US Department of State, Washington, DC, 10 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹³⁸ J. William Fulbright, “STATEMENT BY SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT, CHAIRMAN, SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE,” statement about Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s response to inquiries about the potential use of tactical nuclear weapon in Vietnam, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 15 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹³⁹ Hamilton, *Faux Casus Belli*, 141, 143-145, 150; Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 168.

some time. The theme of the hearings was that the administration had lied to the American public about the event that started the Americanization of the war. The immediate effect of the hearings was to seriously weaken the power of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent. The lasting effect of the hearings, however, was to end the Johnson Presidency, stop escalation of the war, and permanently fix the administration's credibility as the main target of opponents of the war until its end.

In his opening statement at the hearing, Secretary McNamara insisted that both attacks on U.S. vessels—the day attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on 2 August and the night attack on 4 August 1964—had occurred. While he acknowledged that there was some question as to sonar readings and that radar readings “may be subject to interpretation and argument” he insisted that the administration had “incontrovertible evidence of these attacks” based on radio intercepts of North Vietnamese transmissions. Likewise, McNamara also dismissed those who claimed that the signals intelligence equipment aboard the *Maddox* “changed the essential nature of the patrol” in some way. McNamara insisted that the Congress knew of this equipment at the time of the 6 August 1964 hearings.⁹⁴⁰

McNamara insisted that “sufficient information was in the hands of [the] President...to establish beyond any doubt then or now that an attack had taken place” before the order to retaliate was given. He was even more adamant in his denunciation of accusations that the

⁹⁴⁰ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 9, 17, 18, 12.

United States had provoked the attack on 4 August 1964. He said: “I can only characterize such insinuations as monstrous.”⁹⁴¹

A key issue of the hearings was the provocative nature of the patrols. Fulbright established that the *Maddox* was ordered to “penetrate the territorial waters of North Vietnam...assuming their territorial waters was twelve miles.” McNamara admitted that the *Maddox* was ordered to go as close as eight miles to the coast and as close as four miles to coastal islands. Fulbright even got McNamara to acknowledge that the United States recognized Communist China’s twelve-mile limit. However, McNamara would not admit that North Vietnam had declared its territorial waters to extend to twelve miles. Senator Morse returned to this issue later, noting that Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton had testified in May 1966 that North Vietnam asserted a twelve-mile limit. McNamara first claimed that testimony was “ambiguous” and then simply said McNaughton “was wrong.” Senator Pell later added more evidence, noting that, in an English language broadcast about the 2 August 1964 attacks, the North Vietnamese claimed that the *Maddox* was attacked in their “territorial waters.” However, this was not quite a smoking gun; this broadcast had not occurred until 5 August 1964. Still, Pell returned to the heart of the matter: “It is not so much a question of recognizing or not recognizing. We do not willfully want to provoke more hostilities.”⁹⁴²

Another element of the Committee’s case that the patrol had been provocative was its proximity to OPLAN 34A raids being conducted at the same time by South Vietnamese naval

⁹⁴¹ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 9, 17, 18, 19.

⁹⁴² US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 26, 27, 38, 104.

and special operations forces. Senators John Cooper, Wayne Morse, and J. William Fulbright established that, in his testimony on 6 August, McNamara had said, “Our Navy played absolutely no part in it, was not associated with it, was not aware of any South Vietnamese actions, if there were any.” McNamara repeatedly reaffirmed this statement in the 1968 hearing, saying that Captain Herrick had since confirmed this fact to be true. The Committee then showed that this testimony was directly contradicted by a cable sent to the *Maddox* days before the Gulf of Tonkin incident instructing Captain Herrick to assist the OPLAN 34A raids by drawing North Vietnamese patrol boats away from the area of the raids: “draw NVN [North Vietnamese navy] PGMS [patrol boats] to northward away from the area of 34A operations.” If the *Maddox* was instructed to draw North Vietnamese boats away from the OPLAN 34A raids, Morse argued, it was clearly participating in the operation and the North Vietnamese had the “right to attack them on the high seas.” McNamara began denying that he had said the *Maddox* had no knowledge of the OPLAN 34A raids, but Senator Gore would not let the point go: “That was not what you told the committee [on 6 August 1964] though, Mr. Secretary.” McNamara tried to protest that captured North Vietnamese seamen had claimed that they believed the DESOTO patrol was not connected to the OPLAN 34A raids, but Morse argued that that in no way indicated “what the naval operators of North Vietnam not captured were thinking.” Fulbright provided more evidence that the proximity of the patrol to the OPLAN 34A raids was provocative. He quoted a cable sent by the *Maddox* on 3 August that “DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] considers patrol directly involved with 34-A operations...and have already indicated readiness to treat us in that category.” McNamara claimed that Captain Herrick had since recanted this assessment saying there was no basis for it, but Fulbright asked why the patrol was continued even after the cable from Herrick, indicating “that the North Vietnamese regarded them as hostile.” McNamara

argued that they continued to patrol because they were “operating legally and entirely within [their] rights.” Republican Senator John Williams of Delaware noted that the patrol had permission to approach within four miles of islands—including Hon Me, target of the concurrent OPLAN 34A raid. Morse concluded that, since the United States had supplied the South Vietnamese ships and trained the sailors, “It would be a very reasonable conclusion if they [the North Vietnamese] thought there was a connection” to the DESOTO patrol. He added: “I happen to think there was a very clear connection.”⁹⁴³

The nature of the DESOTO patrol as a signals intelligence patrol was also an issue in the hearings. Senator Eugene McCarthy attacked the Secretary’s assertion that the DESOTO patrols were in no way related to the OPLAN 34A raids by questioning whether intelligence gained from communication intercepts was used to identify targets for future raids. Senator Morse insisted that “The *Maddox* was, on this occasion, a spy-ship and quite a different body of international law applies to spy activities than applies to other activities” on the high seas.⁹⁴⁴

Senator Fulbright used the *U.S.S. Pueblo* incident as a tool in the hearings to highlight the provocative nature of the patrols on 4 August 1964. Fulbright noted that, in his *Meet the Press* interview, McNamara had said that “the *Pueblo* was not given air cover and an armed escort because this would have been provocative to the North Koreans.” Fulbright wondered aloud: “Why would not the same term apply in the Gulf of Tonkin, particularly since the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy* had orders that would take them within what the North Vietnamese considered to

⁹⁴³ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 29-30, 49-50, 96-97, 49-50, 38, 40, 82-3.

⁹⁴⁴ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 47, 82-3.

be territorial waters?” Fulbright asked if the *Pueblo* had been given similar orders to the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*. McNamara would not answer.⁹⁴⁵

The Committee also attacked the specifics of the administration’s account of the two patrols on 2 and 4 August 1964. Senator Fulbright questioned whether warning shots were fired on 2 August 1964 as McNamara had testified on 6 August 1964. Senator Fulbright cited Admiral (ret.) Arnold True’s letter to him saying that warning shots were never fired in naval combat, and he also cited a statement from “a gunnery officer aboard the *Maddox*,” quoted in the 16 July 1967 Associated Press article as saying that no warning shots were fired. Fulbright also questioned whether the second incident even occurred and condemned the administration for not sharing its doubts with the Congress. Fulbright noted Captain Herrick’s cable right after the supposed 4 August attack that “many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects and [an] over-eager sonarman may have accounted for many reports” and his recommendation that there be “a complete evaluation before any further action.” McNamara tried to detail the steps that were taken after receiving this cable, but his steps amounted only to conversations with the commander in chief of the Pacific fleet confirming the attack had occurred and a review of the communications intelligence from the North Vietnamese indicating an attack had occurred. Senator Fulbright and Senator Morse immediately countered this assertion, noting that the signals intelligence suggested only one PT boat and two machine gun boats would attack, but as many as 22 torpedoes (requiring 11 PT boats) were reported. Senator Pell was incredulous that the North Vietnamese would order two small boats armed only with machine guns to attack two U.S. destroyers. Fulbright highlighted the Navy’s report on its

⁹⁴⁵ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 42-43, 26.

interrogation of prisoners—interrogations McNamara had earlier cited as evidence that the attack on 4 August had occurred. Two prisoners claimed that “no PT’s could have been involved” while another prisoner “specifically and strongly denies that any attack took place.” Fulbright added that “the North Vietnamese boasted of their attack on the *Maddox* on August 2 and yet vehemently denied that there had been an incident on August 4.” Fulbright also noted that the *Turner Joy* reported that it had detected no radar throughout the attack. Fulbright then got General Wheeler to admit that it would be nearly impossible for the boats to find the destroyers on so dark a night without radar. Later in the hearing, Senator Gore noted that “Admiral Moorer of CincPac cabled the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* to report immediate confirmation of the earlier attack on them” even after the retaliatory air strikes had been ordered. Morse reminded the Committee that he had asked for the logs based on tips from anonymous sources at the Pentagon and was denied them.⁹⁴⁶

Senator Fulbright attempted to explicitly tie doubts about the Gulf of Tonkin incident raised in the hearing to the President’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Fulbright questioned whether the Gulf of Tonkin incident was a pretext for a military intervention that the administration had intended to take anyway, reminding the Committee of the statement the Secretary of Defense had made only two weeks earlier on *Meet the Press* that “three and a half years ago the South Vietnamese forces were on the verge of defeat,” implying that action had been necessary in the summer 1964. McNamara could only say that he had “misestimated the date” and meant the summer of 1965. Fulbright noted that in July 1964 General Khanh of South Vietnam had given a speech “calling for carrying the war to the

⁹⁴⁶ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 41-42, 54-56, 58-59, 66-67, 74, 69-70, 81, 82-3.

north,” and the Senator suggested that Kanh had demanded more forceful U.S. action. Senator Fulbright quoted a *New York Times* article from July 1964 that said “the Pentagon at that time was arguing in favor of extending the war into North Vietnam.” Fulbright also asked if “fighter bombers...moved into Vietnam and Thailand immediately after” the Gulf of Tonkin incident had been given the order before the incident. Fulbright asked McNamara if he had seen “the contingency draft of what became the Southeast Asia resolution before it was ready,” a reference to William Bundy’s admission in 1966 that a draft of the Resolution had existed before the Gulf of Tonkin incident. McNamara said: “My memory is not clear on that.” Morse echoed this point, saying the administration had “in their pocket a resolution ready to spring on us.” Senator Case was more concerned “about the use of this resolution subsequently in ways that were never intended by Congress.” Both Morse and Fulbright disputed the idea that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution could serve as the “functional equivalent” of a declaration of war; Morse called this assertion “of course pure nonsense legally.”⁹⁴⁷

Fulbright concluded: “I think it was very unfair to ask us to vote upon a resolution when the state of the evidence was as uncertain as I think it now is.”⁹⁴⁸ This idea—that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had no power if it was obtained under false pretenses—would become the foundation of Congressional attacks on the validity of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution for the rest of the war. In the 1966 Fulbright hearings, Senator Fulbright had apologized to the nation for his

⁹⁴⁷ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 19, 20, 21-22, 23, 83-84, 88, 52, 86.

⁹⁴⁸ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 80.

role in endorsing the Vietnam War. At the conclusion of this hearing, Fulbright could now amend that apology to place the blame back on the administration:

We met...for 1 hour and 40 minutes...and we accepted your statement completely without doubt.... Of course all my statements were based upon your testimony. I had no independent evidence.... It never occurred to me that there was the slightest doubt.... I regret it more than anything I have ever done in my life, that I was the vehicle which took that resolution to the floor and defended it in complete reliance upon information which, to say the very least, is somewhat dubious at this time.⁹⁴⁹

Referring to Captain Herrick's cable urging no retaliation until facts were clearer, he added: "If I had known of that one telegram, if that had been put before me on the 6th of August, I certainly don't believe I would have rushed into action."⁹⁵⁰ It was an apology that, at the same time, absolved the Senator of guilt for his role in the passage of the Resolution, since important facts were hidden from him.

Senator Gore was even angrier: "I feel that I have been misled, and that the American people have been misled." Senator Gore had made a conclusion from the hearings that would echo well beyond the Vietnam War. Gore told McNamara: "I do not think, Mr. Secretary, the second attack has been established by your testimony today at all." When McNamara tried to protest, Gore added: "I think there is more question now than when you came." Gore insisted that the DESOTO patrol was too close to the OPLAN 34A raids. He insisted that the patrol was

⁹⁴⁹ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 80.

⁹⁵⁰ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 79-80.

provocative because it was a spy mission, too close to the North Vietnamese coast, and supported by air cover.⁹⁵¹ Finally, Gore added:

...the administration was hasty, acted precipitately, inadvisedly, unwisely, out of proportion to the provocation in launching 64 bombing attacks on North Vietnam out of a confused, uncertain situation on a murky night, which one of the sailors described as one dark as the knob of hell; and, particularly, 5 hours after the task force commander had cabled that he doubted that there were any attacks, and recommended no further action be taken until it was thoroughly canvassed and reviewed.⁹⁵²

As the hearing concluded, the Committee and McNamara agreed not to speak to the press about the contents of the hearing. However, as soon as the participants left the Committee chambers, McNamara released the radio intercepts that supported his version of the events of 4 August 1964 and his statement that accusations that the administration had concocted the incident to start a war were “monstrous.” Fulbright responded with his own statement, saying that no one on the Committee had said “there was a deliberate conspiracy to create the Gulf of Tonkin crisis” and that McNamara “suggests a straw man in order to knock it down.” Fulbright went on to say that McNamara had released only that “highly classified information... which serves his purposes” while he had “*not* seen fit to declassify information relating to sonar on the *Maddox*; he has kept secret important communications from the task force that indicated doubt about the reported attack on August 4” (the emphasis is Fulbright’s).⁹⁵³ Fulbright concluded:

⁹⁵¹ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 91-92, 102-103.

⁹⁵² US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 20 February 1968* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 102-103.

⁹⁵³ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “STATEMENT FOR SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT,” statement by Senator J. William Fulbright on Secretary McNamara’s comments on Senate Foreign Relations Committee Gulf

Security classification is intended to protect the nation from an *enemy*, *not to* protect one branch of government against another or the public, not to protect the American people from knowledge of mistakes [(emphasis is Fulbright's)]⁹⁵⁴

Soon after this press release, the *New York Times* published a damningly accurate summary of the hearing.⁹⁵⁵ John W. Finney wrote that the patrol was “not instructed to break off their intelligence-gathering patrol off the coast of North Vietnam” even after the two destroyers “warned higher command that North Vietnam regarded them as enemy craft.” Finney wondered whether “there [was] an element of provocation on the part of the destroyers that induced the North Vietnamese to attack” and if “the Administration [had] sufficient proof of the attack at the time to warrant” the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which the *New York Times* reminded its readers “was later to be described by the State Department as ‘a functional equivalent’ of a declaration of war against North Vietnam.” The *Times* noted that McNamara emphatically insisted that he had “conclusive proof” but noted that the Committee members “were unconvinced by the McNamara testimony.” The *Times* wrote that Fulbright and Gore “went so far as to suggest that the Administration had misled Congress about details of the incident when it sought approval of the Tonkin resolution in 1964.” Finney detailed the questions about whether the 4 August 1964 attacks had happened and the conflicting reports coming out of the

of Tonkin hearings, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 21 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁵⁴ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “STATEMENT FOR SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT,” statement by Senator J. William Fulbright on Secretary McNamara’s comments on Senate Foreign Relations Committee Gulf of Tonkin hearings, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 21 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁵⁵ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 170.

Gulf of Tonkin that day. Finney also wrote that Fulbright convincingly disproved McNamara's testimony from 6 August 1964 that Captain Herrick did not know about the OPLAN 34A raids.⁹⁵⁶ These were charges that had never been leveled before by a national news agency.

The *Times* also interpreted from the transcript of the hearing that McNamara had lied about U.S. involvement in the OPLAN 34A raids.⁹⁵⁷ This, in fact, was more deceit than McNamara had actually committed. However, without public release of the transcript, the Defense Department could not dispute the charge.

The same day, E.W. Kenworthy published an even more confrontational article in the *New York Times* about the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's reaction to the McNamara testimony, writing that "at least nine of the committee's 19 members believe that the Administration over-reacted and that it also withheld some very important facts and was less than candid in presenting others." Kenworthy wrote that Senator Fulbright believed "Mr. McNamara had treaded close to deception on Aug. 6, 1964." Kenworthy also repeated Finney's erroneous charge about "the American direction of South Vietnamese PT boat attacks on North Vietnam" and noted "the messages to the Maddox seeking clarification of what had happened even after the retaliatory strike had been ordered." Kenworthy also cited Senator Gore's

⁹⁵⁶ John W. Finney, Special to The *New York Times*, "M'NAMARA SAYS DESTROYERS IN '64 WARNED OF ENEMY: Tells Senators That ...," Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, 1, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁵⁷ John W. Finney, Special to The *New York Times*, "M'NAMARA SAYS DESTROYERS IN '64 WARNED OF ENEMY: Tells Senators That ...," Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, 1, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

conclusion that the administration had acted precipitously “out of a confused, uncertain situation on, a murky night.” Kenworthy did note that Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield and several other members of the Committee defended the administration.⁹⁵⁸

E.W. Kenworthy also recounted the Committee’s conclusions about the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. He quoted Fulbright’s conclusion during the hearings, “I think it was very unfair to ask us [Congress] to vote upon a resolution...when the state of evidence was as uncertain as I think it now is.” This article added that Fulbright was angry that the Senate was asked to take up “‘the functional equivalent’ of a declaration of war upon evidence of this kind.... Even the commander [of the Maddox]...recommended that nothing be done until the evidence was further evaluated” (the inserts and omissions in the quotation are Kenworthy’s). Kenworthy wrote that Senator Case objected to the use of the “resolution to escalate United States involvement” in South Vietnam while Senator Morse objected to the contingent drafts of the Resolution that existed before the Gulf of Tonkin incident ever occurred.⁹⁵⁹

The *Baltimore Sun* wrote that “key questions [were] still in dispute” after the hearings. Among them were whether the patrols were “a needless provocation,” whether the ships were aiding OPLAN 34A, whether the attack on 4 August 1964 had happened at all, and, if it did,

⁹⁵⁸ E. W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “Nine Senators Feel U.S. Overreacted on Tonkin: Members of Fulbright” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, 29, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁵⁹ E. W. Kenworthy, Special to *The New York Times*, “Nine Senators Feel U.S. Overreacted on Tonkin: Members of Fulbright” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, 29, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

whether the administration had sufficient proof to order a reprisal or demand the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The *Sun* also questioned whether Secretary McNamara had “misled Congress.” These were charges that had not been seen in the national media before. However, this article’s answers to these questions generally favored the administration. The *Sun* concluded that most Senators believed that the Secretary had not deliberately misled Congress or provoked the attacks and also claimed that most Senators believed the administration had sufficient evidence to warrant retaliation (two conclusions that are not at all clear from transcripts of the hearing). However, even the *Sun* noted the trouble McNamara had with the question of whether Captain Herrick had known about the OPLAN 34A raid. The *Sun* also wrote that Senators Cooper, Pell, and Mundt had questioned whether “the Tonkin incidents were of sufficient magnitude to justify military and legislative actions that were a prelude to escalation in Vietnam.”⁹⁶⁰

The 1968 Fulbright hearings had an immediate negative effect on approval of the President’s handling of the Vietnam War. In the aftermath of the hearings, as details were reported in the media, disapproval of the President’s handling of the war rose to 58 percent, with only 32 percent approving. Moreover, after the hearings 54 percent of Americans who had an opinion agreed that the United States had “made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam.” Still, Americans were not ready to quit the war. When asked, 69 percent of Americans who had

⁹⁶⁰ Joseph R. L. Sterne, “Testimony on Tonkin Leaves Much in Doubt: Senate Panel Releases Data Showing Disputes On Actions, Purpose Of U.S. Ships,” Washington, DC, *Baltimore Sun*, 25 February 1968, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

an opinion still identified themselves as “hawk[s],” wanting the United States to “step up our military effort in Vietnam.”⁹⁶¹

Fulbright’s hearing with Secretary McNamara generated new Congressional dissent as well. Republican Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon (a freshman Senator elected in the 1966 midterm elections) introduced a resolution that would prevent the President from placing ground forces outside of South Vietnam without Congressional consent.⁹⁶² This resolution was particularly significant in that its language explicitly stated that it was intended to prevent the President from “widening...the conflict beyond the intended authorization of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution”⁹⁶³ (though this new resolution was silent on whether the President had already done so, as some Senators had claimed in the Fulbright hearings).

Another direct effect of the Fulbright hearings was to dramatically alter dissent against the Vietnam War. Opponents of the war now less often attacked the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify its policies Vietnam. Instead, opponents increasingly attacked Presidential credibility. In an article in *Parade* magazine, Lloyd Shearer accused the administration of dishonesty in its supposed persecution of dissenters. The cases in question were those of perennial dissenter Dr. Benjamin Spock and Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., who were

⁹⁶¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0758* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 22-27 February 1968), 8-10.

⁹⁶² Mark O. Hatfield [Senator, Oregon], letter to members of Senate about proposed resolution to limit President Johnson’s ability to expand Vietnam War beyond South Vietnam, US Senate, Washington, DC, 27 February 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR)..

⁹⁶³ [Mark O. Hatfield, Senator, Oregon], “CONCURRENT RESOLUTION,” draft resolution referred to Senate Foreign Relations Committee intended to limit President Johnson’s ability to expand Vietnam War beyond South Vietnam, US Senate, Washington, DC, [February 1968], Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 1, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

charged with aiding draft resisters. Shearer portrayed this persecution as a betrayal, writing that Spock campaigned for Johnson and quoting Spock as saying he believed the President “when he promised not to send American boys to fight the war in Vietnam.” Spock added that, after he won the election, Johnson phoned him and said: “I hope, Dr. Spock, I will be worthy of your trust.” Shearer concluded by quoting the Council of Bishops in South Vietnam which denounced the South Vietnamese government by asking, “How can there be peace...when those in responsible places mask their false promises behind rhetoric? How can peace prevail if laziness, hypocrisy, and corruption prevail everywhere in society?”⁹⁶⁴ Shearer’s implication, of course, was that one could say the same thing about the United States government.

Even the administration’s stubborn insistence on using the containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, which once would have been attacked by disputing the arguments themselves, was now cast as a form of dishonesty. In a story about the President’s campaign rhetoric before the New Hampshire primaries, syndicated columnist Drew Pearson wrote that the President “takes a vigorous public position against so-called communism in Asia while trying to improve relations with communist countries in Europe.” He continued that, while Johnson’s surrogates in New Hampshire were “warning voters that the ‘communists in Vietnam were watching,’ Johnson’s ambassador in Geneva had signed the most far-reaching pact with the Soviet Union ever reached.” Pearson then recounted the moderation of Communism that was sweeping Eastern Europe and admitted that “President Johnson is all too aware of these shifting developments inside the onetime rigid communist world.” Pearson even admitted that “LBJ has been more farsighted than any other President in shaping America policy

⁹⁶⁴ Lloyd Shearer, “The Baby Doctor and the Chaplain,” *Parade*, 3 March 1968, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

to meet the shifts.” But this was just the prelude to an attack on the President’s credibility; the President was thinking one thing but saying something else. Pearson concluded, “He hasn’t told his speechwriters and his campaign strategists to revamp what they tell the American people, either in New Hampshire or elsewhere around the nation.”⁹⁶⁵ In the 16 March 1968 issue of *Parade* magazine, Lloyd Shearer made a similar case, noting that Senator Lyndon Johnson had disputed Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ assertion of the domino theory and opposed his desire to invade Vietnam in 1954.⁹⁶⁶ The implication, of course, was that the President was dishonest in embracing a policy he had previously rejected and in espousing a domino theory he had once found unconvincing.

In the five days before Walter Cronkite made his famous declaration on the futility of the Vietnam War on 27 February 1968, Americans were deeply skeptical of official optimism about the war. Only 32 percent of those polled believed America was making progress in Vietnam and the same percentage approved of Johnson’s handling of the war.⁹⁶⁷ Walter Cronkite’s commentary at the end of a special report after his return from South Vietnam was particularly devastating to the administration’s credibility because it spoke directly to the American public’s belief that it was being lied to by its government. He said:

To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists that have been wrong in the past.... In the off chance that military and political analysts are right, in the next few months we must test the enemy’s

⁹⁶⁵ Drew Pearson, “Washington Merry-Go-Round: Vietnam’s The Issue In New Hampshire,” Washington, DC, *Gadsden Times*, Gadsden, AL, 12 March 1968, 4.

⁹⁶⁶ Lloyd Shearer, “The Untold Story Of ‘OPERATION VULTURE,’” *Personality Parade Magazine*, *Palm Beach Post*, 16 March 1968, 40.

⁹⁶⁷ Gallup, “Gallup Poll # 758,” Gallup, 22-27 February 1968.

intentions in case this is indeed his last big gasp before negotiations.⁹⁶⁸

This pronouncement had a further negative effect on public opinion. Johnson's job approval dropped to 36 percent⁹⁶⁹ and approval of Johnson's war policy dropped to 26 percent.⁹⁷⁰

Political Upheaval in Washington

In the aftermath of Fulbright's hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1968, the President's credibility was in shambles. Political maneuvering by the Pentagon further eroded the administration's credibility and provided an opening for Senator Fulbright to deliver a death blow to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent. However, most opponents of the war were more concerned with attacking the administration's credibility. Rather than shore up its credibility, the administration continued to stubbornly use the containment of Communism to justify the war. However, as attacks on its credibility mounted daily and hopes for the Democratic primary race seemed ever more remote, the President finally decided to withdraw from the Presidential race. This did little to slow attacks on the President's credibility. In fact, only radical protesters continued to attack the ideology of containment in late spring 1968; other opponents of the war had almost exclusively begun to attack the administration's credibility.

In the midst of this crisis of credibility, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler maneuvered General Westmoreland into requesting 206,000 more troops as part of Wheeler's own bureaucratic quest to force President Johnson to mobilize the U.S. Army

⁹⁶⁸ Walter Cronkite, "Walter Cronkite Vietnam 1968," CBS News, 27 February 1968, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn4w-ud-TyE>, accessed 2 August 2014.

⁹⁶⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 559.

⁹⁷⁰ Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency*, 45; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 559.

Reserves. The *New York Times*' Neil Sheehan and Hedrick Smith broke the story.⁹⁷¹

Westmoreland was forced to turn down the troops, presumably in order to protect his optimistic assessment of the Tet Offensive. The President denied that the request had been made, also presumably in order to protect his optimistic assessments. These denials only deepened the President's crisis of credibility.⁹⁷²

This revelation also provided the opening for which the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and its chairman, Senator Fulbright, had been waiting. On 7 March 1968, Fulbright called for Congressional debate on this proposed expansion of the war. In his speech on the Senate floor, Fulbright made it clear that his real target was the President's insurance policy against Congressional dissent, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. He reminded his colleagues that the President had promised not to use the Resolution to expand the war and had promised not to send American boys to fight a war in Asia. Fulbright concluded that this made the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, "like any contract based on misrepresentation[,],... null and void."⁹⁷³

Fulbright firmly placed the last nail in the coffin of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent on 12 March 1968, when Secretary of State Dean Rusk appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. After an angry exchange between the Secretary and Senator Fulbright, Rusk tried to invoke the administration's insurance policy against Congressional dissent one last time. He reminded the Chairman that "Congress itself, with two dissenting votes," had agreed to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Fulbright replied that the administration had used the Resolution as "a method of avoiding and preventing both consultation and discussion," noting that the Secretary had testified for less than two hours

⁹⁷¹ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 483.

⁹⁷² Karnow, *Vietnam*, 562, 571-572.

⁹⁷³ Woods, *J. William Fulbright...*, 164.

before the Resolution was passed. Rusk retorted that “there was time, if the Congress wanted to take more time.”⁹⁷⁴ Fulbright replied angrily,

The Administration insisted that...its purpose [was to deter North Vietnam] and it was not to enlarge the war and so on...What I am proposing is that we not follow this old system of just accepting anything the Administration sends down without question, which we have literally done and did in August '64. We had entirely too much confidence, in my opinion, in the wisdom of this or any Administration.⁹⁷⁵

Administration deception, Fulbright insisted, invalidated the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

With attacks on the administration’s credibility mounting daily, the President also faced the New Hampshire primary against Senate Foreign Relations Committee member and war opponent Senator Eugene McCarthy. Syndicated columnist Drew Pearson praised the candidacy of Eugene McCarthy for doing “two healthy things.” First, Pearson wrote, his candidacy gave “the people of New Hampshire a choice to vote for or against war.” However, McCarthy had also broken the taboo “which stymied American foreign policy in John Foster Dulles’s day”—the taboo against opposing the Cold War consensus for fear of being called soft on Communism. But Drew Pearson’s real intent was not to praise McCarthy but to attack Johnson’s credibility. He wrote that the Johnson camp had resurrected “the old Joe McCarthy bugaboo” with radio ads warning that “the communists in Vietnam are watching the New Hampshire primary.... Don’t vote for fuzzy thinking and surrender.” Pearson concluded by echoing Eugene McCarthy’s argument that “what motivates the Vietnamese is nationalism, not communism.”⁹⁷⁶

⁹⁷⁴ Washington Post, “Fulbright: ‘The Idea Is to Influence You Into a Wiser Policy,’” *Washington Post*, 13 March 1968, A10.

⁹⁷⁵ Washington Post, “Fulbright: ‘The Idea Is to Influence You Into a Wiser Policy,’” *Washington Post*, 13 March 1968, A10.

⁹⁷⁶ Drew Pearson, “Washington Merry-Go-Round: Vietnam’s The Issue In New Hampshire,” Washington, DC, *Gadsden Times*, Gadsden, AL, 12 March 1968, 4.

On 12 March, President Johnson narrowly defeated Senator Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary. This was widely seen as a sign of the President's weakness and boosted the profile of McCarthy as a viable candidate. The President's political troubles deepened further on 19 March 1968, when Senator Robert F. Kennedy entered the Presidential race.

The President's response to these new threats to his Presidency was to once more use the ideology of military containment to defend U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. In a 19 March foreign policy briefing, the President gave an impassioned defense of the centrality of the Vietnam War to America's future in the world. He said that America's foreign policy objective was "to build a world in which we and our children and our neighbors throughout the world may live in freedom," adding that "the heritage of 5,000 years of human civilization then hangs on our success." He challenged the American people to persevere: "History has elected to probe the depth of our commitment to freedom. How strongly are we really devoted to resist the tide of aggression?" He added that the American people were participants in the Vietnam War: "Aggression fights not only on the battlefield of the village and hill and jungle and city. The enemy has reached out to fight in the hearts and minds of the American people." The President added: "He has mounted a heavy and a calculated attack on our character as a people—on our confidence and our will as a nation." Lyndon Johnson said the Tet Offensive was "aimed squarely at the citizens of America. It is an assault that is designed to crack America's will." Johnson added, "It is designed to make some men want to surrender; it is designed to make other men want to withdraw; it is designed to trouble and worry and confuse others." Johnson claimed the Communists sought "more than the destruction of the Pacific dream where a new and prospering Asia sees its hopeful future." The President concluded that the American people were

“the aggressor's real target because of what we represent.... What other nation in the world is going to stand up and protect the little man's freedom anywhere in the world?”⁹⁷⁷

In this speech, the President also made his most impassioned defense yet of the application of the lesson of Munich to the Vietnam War. He compared those dissenters who wanted to give up the fight in Vietnam to those “well-meaning, sincere, good people around this entire country” who, before World War II, “were pledging themselves never to bear arms” and “castigating our Government for any involvement beyond our own shores.” Johnson said that President Roosevelt had “warned the world that...the shadow of aggression threatened not only the nations that were immediately in the aggressor's path, but it threatened the future of all free men and women.” Because of the lack of foresight of these earlier dissenters, he claimed, “It took some time and it took a world catastrophe to wake men up and for them to finally hear that message when we were attacked.” Johnson implored the American people: “So, let this generation of ours learn from the mistakes of the past. Let us recognize that there is no resigning from world responsibility.”⁹⁷⁸

Many media supporters of the administration’s use of containment to justify the war, muted since the beginning of the Tet Offensive, followed suit. John Chamberlain argued that the debate was over: “the domino theory is less of a theory than it is a living present reality.” The North Vietnamese, Chamberlain claimed, were “overrunning government outposts in northern

⁹⁷⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE FOREIGN POLICY BRIEFING, THE STATE DEPARTMENT,” Office of the White House Press Secretary, White House, Washington, DC, 19 March 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁷⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE FOREIGN POLICY BRIEFING, THE STATE DEPARTMENT,” Office of the White House Press Secretary, White House, Washington, DC, 19 March 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

and central Laos” while, in Cambodia, “Prince Norodom Sihanouk, no lover of Americans, has suddenly become vocal in his alarm about the domino theory as it may affect his country.” In Thailand, Chamberlain added, “Thai troops had destroyed a secret Communist guerilla camp near the Laotian border” just as “Rusk was supplying the documentation of the workings of the domino theory in Cambodia for his senatorial inquisitors [in the 1968 Fulbright hearings].” Because the domino theory was playing out, Chamberlain added, “the latest tactic of those who think the U.S. has no business in Southeast Asia is to say that it hardly matters whether Communism spreads or not.” As an example, Chamberlain cited John Kenneth Galbraith as claiming “all Asian villages are alike no matter who runs them.”⁹⁷⁹

Arguments from the administration and its supporters about the necessity of the Vietnam War to contain Communism were not just unnecessary; they missed the heart of the American public’s dissatisfaction with the Johnson administration. The majority of Americans already agreed with the President that the Vietnam War was necessary to contain Communism. What most Americans doubted was the President’s honesty and his ability to apply sufficient means to win the war. Presumably in an effort to address at least the latter of these points, President Johnson announced on 22 March 1968 that General Westmoreland would be replaced as the commander of MAC-V by Westmoreland’s deputy, General Creighton Abrams.⁹⁸⁰ This move did nothing to stop the bleeding. The administration had done nothing to address doubts about its credibility, its more serious problem.

⁹⁷⁹ John Chamberlain, “These Days: Domino Theory At Work Following Tet Offensive,” King Features Syndicate, *Daily News*, Bowling Green, KY, 17 March 1968, 64.

⁹⁸⁰ Ronnie E. Ford, *Tet 1968: Understanding Surprise* (New York: Frank Cass, 1995), 132; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 493.

With the administration's crisis of credibility deepening daily, *Esquire* magazine published an article by David Wise about the Gulf of Tonkin incident that focused on the ways in which the Congress had been deceived called "Remember the *Maddox*!" (referencing the battle cry of the Spanish-American War, "Remember the *Maine*," a similarly disputed attack on a U.S. naval vessel).⁹⁸¹ This article was a significant expansion of earlier media attacks on the Gulf of Tonkin incident in that it was the first to explicitly echo Senator Fulbright's charge that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had been obtained from Congress under false pretenses. The article began by reiterating what Senator Fulbright had said was the significance of the whole affair:

[After the incident] the President persuaded Congress to pass his Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorizing the President to take "all necessary steps" to defend South Vietnam. He has since used this resolution as a blank check to escalate the conflict, and he has dared Congress to repeal it, knowing it will not. The resolution has been his single greatest trump card in prosecuting the war.⁹⁸²

Wise added that "some Congressmen came to feel they may have been misled into passing the resolution." Wise also wrote: "The Pentagon's version of the incident is open to question. The evidence is sometimes conflicting, and many assertions of the Defense Department at the time have since turned out to be incorrect." Despite the fact that this incident was "murky [and] confused," Wise wrote, the incident was "used by the Administration as the Pearl Harbor of the Vietnam war." Wise recounted the signals intelligence equipment on the *Maddox* stating

⁹⁸¹ David Wise, "Remember the *Maddox*!" *Esquire*, April 1968, 123, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁸² David Wise, "Remember the *Maddox*!" *Esquire*, April 1968, 123, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

unequivocally: “The *Maddox* was on a spy mission. But this was not revealed at the time to Congress or the public.” Wise added that this type of mission was “risky and can lead to international incidents, as in the case of the U-2, the RB-47, or the Tonkin Gulf” (RB-47 was a reference to a spy plane shot down by the Soviet Union over the Barrents Sea, creating another international incident). Wise reminded his readers: “At the time the attacks were repeatedly described as ‘unprovoked.’” Under a picture of the first attack was the caption: “The Administration failed to make clear that the U.S. had been patrolling within the twelve-mile limit asserted by Hanoi, and it did not tell Congress the *Maddox* had been on a spy mission or that it fired first.” Wise underscored this point in the article by recalling Senator Lausche’s exchange with General Wheeler on 6 August 1964 in which Lausche was told that the North Vietnamese fired first, an assurance Lausche repeated on the floor of the Senate during the perfunctory debate over the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Wise recounted all of the doubts that the two destroyer crews had on 4 August 1964, including the revelation that Commander Herbert L. Ogier, captain of the *Maddox* on 4 August 1964, believed that almost all of the 21 torpedoes his ship detected that evening were the result of his own rudder steer. Wise quoted crewmen from the two ships as questioning the reliability of sonar evidence of torpedo attacks. Wise jokingly referred to this as “the Sonar Gap” and likewise called conflicting radar evidence from the two ships “the Radar Gap,” references to the so-called “credibility gap.” Wise also challenged the various eyewitness sightings of torpedoes in the water on that night by showing the ways in which their descriptions conflicted. Wise noted that McNamara “had no doubts” in his testimony on 6 August that the ships had been fired on by automatic weapons, even though Captain Barnhart of the *Turner Joy* said that his ship was never fired on by guns of any kind. Wise also recounted the retaliation, noting: “Although Commander Wesley McDonald himself had seen no P.T. boats on the night of

August 4, the next day he found himself leading a retaliatory strike on Vinh under direct orders of the President of the United States.” Wise then recounted the dispute over whether the ships had been involved in OPLAN 34A raids, noting that Bundy had said on an ABC news program that the ships “had no part whatsoever in any such action.” Wise wrote that Senator Richard B. Russell believed that the North Vietnamese might have reasonably concluded that the ships were involved.⁹⁸³

Wise returned at the end of the article to his main point, which was that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had been passed under false pretenses. He wrote: “Some members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee felt that the resolution had been passed chiefly in order to back the President after U.S. ships had been attacked and to express approval of the retaliatory air raid.” However, he added: “They were chagrined three years later to find Johnson using the resolution as a broad approval to fight a major land war.” After unconvincing testimony from officials in the administration over this period, Wise wrote, William Bundy admitted that there had been “contingent drafts” of the resolution before the incident. Wise wrote: “The feeling began to grow in Congress that Tonkin Gulf might have been an incident waiting to happen.” Wise added that the issue came to a head when Nicholas Katzenbach told the Foreign Relations Committee that the President didn’t need the resolution but, in Wise’ words, “Congress had passed it and ought to have known what it was doing.”⁹⁸⁴ Wise concluded:

⁹⁸³ David Wise, “Remember the Maddox!” *Esquire*, April 1968, 123, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁸⁴ David Wise, “Remember the Maddox!” *Esquire*, April 1968, 123, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-

The Johnson Administration, for a variety of domestic political and foreign policy reasons, seized eagerly upon fragmentary, confused reports from the Tonkin Gulf and presented them to Congress and the public as accomplished facts. The Administration had its contingency drafts ready for just such an incident. And when many of those “facts” turned out to be erroneous, it would not concede this.⁹⁸⁵

Wised added: “It was a classic example of how government, by shaping and controlling information about a military event, can whip up popular emotion and bend Congress and the public to its will.”⁹⁸⁶

As its crisis of credibility deepened daily, internal White House polling revealed serious trouble for the President in the upcoming primaries. One poll showed that, while he enjoyed 67 percent approval with New York voters, Johnson had only 47 percent approval—compared to Robert Kennedy’s 65 percent approval—among self-identified liberals.⁹⁸⁷ And Johnson’s numbers were even worse in the rest of the country.⁹⁸⁸

In a televised speech on 31 March 1968, the President again used the containment of Communism to argue for continued U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. He reminded Americans of the positive implications of the domino theory, saying: “A number of its [Southeast Asia’s] nations have shown what can be accomplished under conditions of security.”

TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁸⁵ David Wise, “Remember the Maddox!” *Esquire*, April 1968, 123, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁸⁶ David Wise, “Remember the Maddox!” *Esquire*, April 1968, 123, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-6 Sub-Committees, Hearings, Studies, Investigations, 1967-1969, Box 28. Folder 3, (HEARING-TONKIN BAY RESOLUTION) 1967-1968), 1967-1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

⁹⁸⁷ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 430, 427.

⁹⁸⁸ Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War*, 113.

He added: “We can rightly judge—as responsible Southeast Asians themselves do—that the progress of the past 3 years would have been far less likely—if not completely impossible—if America’s sons and others had not made their stand in Vietnam.” The war in Vietnam was “vital not only to the security of Southeast Asia, but...to the security of every American.”⁹⁸⁹ The President returned to the domino theory, claiming that the United States’ goal of “peace and self-determination in Vietnam is directly related to the future of all of Southeast Asia.” The President claimed that this had been the aim of U.S. involvement in Vietnam “under three Presidents, three separate Administrations.”⁹⁹⁰

The President also tentatively recalled his broken insurance policy against Congressional dissent. Among the commitments he said the United States still had to South Vietnam were the “Resolutions of the Congress [that] testify to the need to resist aggression in the world and in Southeast Asia.”⁹⁹¹

The President concluded his speech with a bombshell; he announced that he would institute an unconditional bombing halt everywhere in North Vietnam except the area just above the demilitarized zone (DMZ). He also said that he would not run for reelection to the

⁹⁸⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection, March 31, 1968,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-69*. Volume I, entry 170 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 469-476, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1968-january-1969/03-31-1968.html>.

⁹⁹⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks of the President to the Nation,” 31 March 1968, Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War. Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1965-1968. Volume VI: C--U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965-1967. Program 6, 80-81, 86-87, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>.

⁹⁹¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks of the President to the Nation,” 31 March 1968, Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War. Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1965-1968. Volume VI: C--U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965-1967. Program 6, 80-81, 86-87, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>.

Presidency.⁹⁹² Johnson claimed that both moves were intended to bring the North Vietnamese to the table to reach a settlement that would allow the U.S. to leave and South Vietnam to survive as an independent country. This speech was followed by an announcement by the new Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, that the escalation of troops in Vietnam would come to an end after the deployment of the announced 50,000 troops.⁹⁹³

The immediate reaction to the President's announcement that he would not run was shock. Edwin Newman, in NBC coverage immediately following the speech, said the announcement would "stagger the entire world," calling it the "biggest bombshell of this year, and in fact of many years in politics." Newman did note that the President's decision to stop the bombing "undercuts the critics here at home that say Mr. Johnson is not serious about negotiations." Newman added that "the President took the diplomatic offensive tonight and, in doing so, somewhat disarmed his critics here at home." Newman concluded that those critics would be "on the spot if nothing comes of tonight's moves." Reporter Elie Abel, from a studio in Wisconsin where he was covering the Democratic primary, noted that Johnson might "try to push Hubert Humphrey into this political race." Reporter Herbert Kaplow added that "Hubert Humphrey is the heir designate." In an interview with Robert Goralski, Republican Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey focused on the news about Vietnam, saying that he was "terribly happy that this will now lead to an open discussion of Vietnam and all the related issues in both parties." He added that "a reassessment of Vietnam and everything related to it is absolutely

⁹⁹² Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection, March 31, 1968," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-69*. Volume I, entry 170 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 469-476, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1968-january-1969/03-31-1968.html>.

⁹⁹³ A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 493.

essential.” Democratic Senator (and future Vice President) Walter Mondale of Minnesota used the announcement to defend the President’s credibility, saying that “the President was more committed to the objectives of peace than some rhetoric and style has permitted the public to accept.”⁹⁹⁴

The reaction the day after the President’s withdrawal from the Presidential race was unbridled, if unwarranted, optimism that the President’s gesture made the end of the war a foregone conclusion. In NBC News coverage of Senator Robert F. Kennedy’s news conference in reaction to the President’s announcement, reporter Edward Newman seemed to think the war would no longer be a political issue, saying Kennedy “would continue his campaign” since “there were other issues in the campaign besides Vietnam.” In his own comments, Kennedy seemed more concerned that Johnson might renege on his promise. Kennedy repeatedly said that he took Johnson “at his word that he is not going to run and he is not going to submit to a draft.” In NBC News coverage of other reactions to the President’s withdrawal from the race, anchor Nancy Dickerson noted that Richard Nixon suggested “it would be wise not to count Vice President Humphrey out.” She also noted—in a voiceover of a picture of long-haired, bearded revelers burning dollar bills in the night—that “about a hundred demonstrators danced in the park across the street from the White House after Mr. Johnson announced his decision. They burned dollar bills as part of their demonstration.”⁹⁹⁵

⁹⁹⁴ Edwin Newman, “NBC Coverage of President’s 31 March 1968 speech,” *NBC Special Report*, NBC, New York, 31 March 1968, Video #0242, “POTUS talk on Vietnam; includes declaration not to run,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹⁹⁵ Edwin Newman, “Kennedy Comments on LBJ 31 March Speech,” *NBC News Special Report*, NBC, 1 April 1968, Video #0246, “Robert Kennedy comments on POTUS speech,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

The only note of caution the day after the announcement came from Walter Cronkite after CBS coverage of Robert Kennedy's reaction to the announcement. Cronkite warned: "What President Johnson may have thought were his finest hours may have turned out to be a diplomatic blunder." He added: "In stepping down from the Presidency while also opening the peace overtures" the President may have made himself a diplomatic lame duck.⁹⁹⁶

The initial reaction of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to the President's withdrawal from the Democratic primary race reflected its deep suspicion of the President's motives and credibility. In an internal memo from chief of staff Carl Marcy to Senator Fulbright, Marcy warned that, since the President had "no constituency to satisfy or hold him back," he had great power over the remainder of his Presidency "for good or evil." He could "escalate in Vietnam over the protests of the 'doves'; or 'cut and run' over the protests of the 'hawks.'"⁹⁹⁷ Marcy's suspicion of the President was so deep that the only possibility that Marcy did not suggest was that the President would do exactly what he had promised in his 31 March 1968 speech—halt almost all bombing in North Vietnam and start negotiations with Hanoi.

Many in the American public were just as skeptical of the administration's credibility. The *Lewiston Morning Tribune* printed a letter to the editor from a Jesse Merlan decrying new Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford's "promises we can 'return U.S. soldiers from Vietnam'

⁹⁹⁶ Robert F. Kennedy, Walter Cronkite, "Campaign '68: Comments of Senator Robert F. Kennedy on the speech of President Johnson," *CBS Special Report*, 1 April 1968, Video #0240-A, "Comments Kennedy on Speech of LBJ," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

⁹⁹⁷ Carl Marcy, memorandum for Senator J. William Fulbright with thoughts on President Johnson's decision not to run for re-election, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 3 April 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

even as we sent 50,000 more troops.” Merlan quipped: “On paper and in windy speeches, we’ve been returning ‘our boys’ since 1963.”⁹⁹⁸

Supporters of the war were incensed by the President’s move and lashed out. Consistent administration supporter C.L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* used the President’s own words to attack his decision to institute a bombing halt as a surrender to Communism. Sulzberger repeatedly reminded his readers that the President “insisted that no small nation anywhere would be safe if the U.S. ‘got out of Vietnam.’” Sulzberger lamented that, “Having already made major public concessions to Ho Chi Minh, the President cannot hope to reverse his course again.” Using the President’s argument that he was continuing the policies of his predecessors, Sulzberger wrote, “either the U.S. has been wrong in its Southeast Asian policy under the last three Presidents or it is wrong today.” Using the President’s arguments about South Vietnam being a test of U.S. commitments around the world, Sulzberger concluded that it was doubtful whether “nations will continue to rely on U.S. resolve or, as the President himself warned, they will no longer feel safe anywhere.”⁹⁹⁹

The public seemed to approve of the President’s dramatic moves of 31 March 1968. While many Americans still disapproved of the President’s handling of the war, Americans were much more positive about the President’s policies in Vietnam after his decision not to run, with 48 percent disapproving of his handling of the war and 42 percent approving—essentially erasing the precipitous drop in approval the President had experience since the start of the Tet Offensive. Also, while most Americans had disapproved of the idea of a bombing halt before it

⁹⁹⁸ Jesse Peter Merlan, “Pay My Share,” Moscow, ID, *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, Lewiston, ID, 27 April 1968, 4.

⁹⁹⁹ C.L. Sulzberger, “LBJ Vietnam Concessions Mark Domino Theory Death,” Paris, *New York Times*, *Press-Courier*, Oxnard, CA, 7 April 1968, 6.

was instituted, after the President enacted the partial bombing halt, 72 percent of Americans who had an opinion approved of the move.¹⁰⁰⁰

This move also had an immediate negative impact on the American public's willingness to continue the war. After the President's dramatic moves for peace on 31 March 1968, only 51 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion still identified themselves as "hawk[s]," while 49 percent now identified themselves as "dove[s]." Fifty-five percent of Americans who had an opinion now said it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam.¹⁰⁰¹

The mainstream political debate over the Vietnam War had decisively shifted to an argument between supporters of the war—using containment to justify continued military intervention in Vietnam—and opponents of the war—attacking the administration's credibility on the war. Even Senator J. William Fulbright, who had spent the previous three years attacking the administration's use of containment to justify the war, now focused his attacks on the President's credibility. Fulbright still attacked the administration's use of containment to justify the war—calling the domino theory "nonsense"—but this was little more than a refrain before he attacked the administration's reluctance to begin negotiations. Fulbright reminded the country that the President had said he would negotiate anywhere at any time, but was now balking at the North Vietnamese' suggestions of sites for negotiations. He concluded by saying that, in continuing the war, the United States was "playing the script...written for us by Mao."¹⁰⁰²

¹⁰⁰⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0760: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 4-9 April 1968), 10.

¹⁰⁰¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0760: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 4-9 April 1968), 11-19.

¹⁰⁰² John W. Kole, "Don't Miscalculate, Rusk Tells Hanoi," Washington, DC, *Milwaukee Journal*, Milwaukee, WI, 18 April 1968, 2.

Fulbright was not just engaging in political rhetoric. Staffers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were deeply skeptical that the President truly wanted negotiations.¹⁰⁰³

While the mainstream opposition to the Vietnam War had decisively shifted to attacks on the administration's credibility on the war, radical dissenters continued to assail the ideology of containment itself and its distorting effect on American society and U.S. foreign policy. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) continued to argue that "US policy in Vietnam [was] part of a global strategy for containing revolutionary change in the 'Third World' nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America." The SDS continued: "Rather than the result of an essentially good government's mistaken decisions, we see the world wide exploitation and oppression of those insurgent peoples as the logical conclusion of the giant US corporations' expanding and necessary search for higher profits and strategic resources."¹⁰⁰⁴

The California Peace and Freedom Movement argued that the Vietnam War was "the logical consequence of an American economic imperialism which requires the subordination of foreign resources, markets, and political structures to the needs of corporate property and profit." The Movement criticized this foreign policy paradigm as using the "pretense of protecting the world from Communism" to support "reactionary regimes throughout the world" and thwart "the aspirations of its peoples and maintaining them in a condition of bondage." The Movement

¹⁰⁰³ Jim Lowenstein [Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer], memorandum for Carl Marcy about status of negotiations in Paris, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 11 June 1968, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 5, 1968, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

¹⁰⁰⁴ SDS, *An Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Students for a Democratic Society, 1968), 4.

concluded by calling the wars generated by this foreign policy paradigm “imperialistic interventions.”¹⁰⁰⁵

SDS President Carl Oglesby wrote an open letter to those radical dissenters who might support antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy, urging them to withdraw from the American political process. Oglesby wrote that McCarthy’s “overriding objective is the defense of the same American Empire which we find flatly unsupportable.” McCarthy’s antiwar stance was not a rejection of the ideology of containment, but a “pre-condition of revamped containment/imperialism.” Oglesby added that this was also the objective of the military-industrial complex that had become concerned with the security of its economic hegemony in Europe and Latin America. Oglesby wrote: “McCarthy...among all the candidates, possibly understood this best, maybe even first. That may be commendable.” However, Oglesby added, “McCarthy’s ‘practicality’ amounts in the end to the adulteration of the necessary critique of the War, the obscuring of its sources in the system of American expansionism.” Radicals should, in Oglesby’s opinion, reject McCarthy’s antiwar campaign because he wanted to end the war for the wrong reasons. McCarthy’s ultimate objective, Oglesby wrote, was “the retention and even reinforcing of the Truman-to-Johnson containment line.”¹⁰⁰⁶

The Presidential Race

As the Presidential race took shape after the departure of President Johnson from the campaign, the Democratic Party was split on the issue of the Vietnam War. The antiwar wing

¹⁰⁰⁵ California Peace and Freedom Movement, “California Peace And Freedom Movement Program,” Founding Convention, Richmond, CA, March 1968, reprinted in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 408.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Carl Oglesby “An Open Letter To McCarthy Supporters,” 1968, in *The New Left: A Documentary History* by Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 412.

represented by Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy sought a rapid negotiated settlement that would include the National Liberation Front in the South Vietnamese government—thus sacrificing the goal of containment of Communism in Southeast Asia in order to end the war. Vice President Hubert Humphrey was never specific on his particular desires for the war but was generally understood as embracing President Johnson’s use of the containment of Communism to justify holding out for a more favorable settlement of the war. However, Hubert Humphrey was soon saddled with the same credibility problems that had crippled President Johnson.

The Republican Party quickly unified behind a vague platform supporting the use of the containment of Communism to justify the war while promising an “honorable end” to the war, which most in the media and the American public understood to mean continuing the war to a favorable conclusion. Candidate Richard Nixon also attacked radical protesters who still directed their attacks against the Cold War consensus—most dramatically at violent protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. By identifying himself with the ideology of military containment of Communism, Nixon was able to defeat Humphrey by a narrow majority.

While the candidates debated over the ideology of containment and its applicability to the war in Vietnam, elsewhere the public debate over the war had moved beyond this framework. Instead supporters of continuing the war to a successful conclusion continued to use the containment of Communism to justify their position while opponents of the war attacked the administration’s credibility. In fact, the Presidential race would mark the dramatic end of mainstream opposition to the ideology of containment or its applicability to the Vietnam War; after the 1968 Presidential election, only radical dissenters would continue to make these opposition arguments.

Robert Kennedy entered the Democratic primary race as an antiwar candidate in mid-March 1968. The platform for his candidacy was compromising the objective of containing Communism in Vietnam in order to end the war in Vietnam. In announcing his candidacy, he claimed that he was running because the “country is on a perilous course.” He ran to enact new policies “to end the bloodshed in Vietnam.” His critique of the war was that it held the “growing risk of world war,” that it “further destroys the country and the people it was meant to save,” and that “the reality of recent events in Vietnam has been glossed over with illusions”—an implicit indictment of the administration’s credibility. His critique of Johnson’s foreign policy was that it ignored “the uses and the limitations of military power” and “the value of negotiations with allies and with enemies.” Kennedy sought to identify with radical dissenters, claiming that he had “listened to the young people of our nation and their anger about the war that they are sent to fight and about the world that they are about to inherit.” Kennedy favored “deescalating the struggle.” He wanted the South Vietnamese to take more responsibility for their own defense (the strategy Westmoreland had announced before the Tet Offensive). Kennedy wanted the United States to stop bombing North Vietnam (a step Johnson would take less than two weeks later). He wanted corruption in Saigon to end and the South Vietnamese government to begin drafting 18- and 19-year old men. In fact, the only point of true departure from Johnson’s policies in Vietnam was that Kennedy accepted that “the National Liberation Front is going to play a role in the future political process of South Vietnam.”¹⁰⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰⁷ Roger Mudd, Robert F. Kennedy, “Senator Robert F. Kennedy’s Announcement to Run For The Presidency,” *CBS News Special Report*, Live from Washington, 16 March 1968, Video # 0214-A, “Coverage of Sen. Kennedy’s candidacy announcement,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

The entry of Robert Kennedy into the Democratic Primary race created a media-ready conflict between Senator Eugene McCarthy and Senator Kennedy; before the New Hampshire primary, Kennedy had supposedly encouraged McCarthy to run and assured him he would not enter the race. This conflict was repeatedly stoked by the media.¹⁰⁰⁸

However, despite their rivalry, the two men revealed that—their deep desire that the other man not be the Democratic nominee notwithstanding—their positions on both the Vietnam War and the broader ideology of containment were nearly identical. Eugene McCarthy’s policy prescription was “de-escalating the war in Vietnam, drawing back from some of our advanced positions while still holding strength in Vietnam” and a recognition “that we have to have a new government in South Vietnam.... And...that that new government would include the National Liberation Front.” Kennedy favored an end to corruption in Saigon, an end to “the search and destroy missions by American troops and American Marines,” and a push to force South Vietnamese to draft its 18- and 19-year olds. Kennedy tried to draw a difference, saying that he would insist “the government [in] Saigon would begin their own negotiations with the National Liberation Front.” The two men differed little on the ideology of containment, either. McCarthy emphasized that the United States should only be involved in places where it had “clear obligations” such as Formosa, the Middle East, and Western Europe. Kennedy believed that the line should be drawn “between external aggression and internal turmoil.” But both still clearly

¹⁰⁰⁸ Roger Mudd, Robert F. Kennedy, “Senator Robert F. Kennedy’s Announcement to Run For The Presidency,” *CBS News Special Report*, Live from Washington, 16 March 1968, Video # 0214-A, “Coverage of Sen. Kennedy’s candidacy announcement,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

supported the idea of using military containment to block Communist aggression. Both simply disagreed that Vietnam was a case of Communist aggression.¹⁰⁰⁹

The most consistent critique of both McCarthy's and Kennedy's campaigns was that they aided Communists. The first question Kennedy received at the announcement of his candidacy was from a reporter who noted, "At the Budapest conference Gus Hall, head of the Communist Party, said that he welcomes McCarthy's campaign to set up this new antiwar movement." The reporter asked Kennedy, "Are you going to accept his endorsement too?"¹⁰¹⁰ This critique would continue to plague McCarthy even after Robert Kennedy's assassination on 6 June 1968.

While Presidential candidates debated the suitability of the ideology of containment to the Vietnam War, most opponents had decisively shifted their attacks to the administration's credibility. With sales of his new book *Anything but the Truth* brisk, author Erwin Knoll made the rounds of the Washington talk shows to promote his book. Knoll appeared on Washington, D.C. ABC affiliate WJLA on *Here's Barbara* and pilloried the administration for its deceptiveness. Knoll recalled that the President had given the Pentagon a smaller troop increase than it had asked for and then got the generals to agree on camera that the increase was adequate. "It was all a put up job. It was an artificial show of unanimity of the kind we've gotten so used to." Knoll questioned "some of the news that is coming out of Vietnam during these [peace] talks" as well as "these incredibly cheerful assessments emanating from Vietnam.... these highly

¹⁰⁰⁹ Frank Reynolds (moderator), Bill Lawrence (ABC News Editor), Bob Clark, Robert F. Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy, "Issues and Answers with Kennedy vs. McCarthy," *Issues and Answers*, ABC, 1 June 1968, Video #0981, "Issues and answers: RFK vs. Sen. Eugene McCarthy," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁰¹⁰ Roger Mudd, Robert F. Kennedy, "Senator Robert F. Kennedy's Announcement to Run For The Presidency," *CBS News Special Report*, Live from Washington, 16 March 1968, Video # 0214-A, "Coverage of Sen. Kennedy's candidacy announcement," Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

dubious casualty counts.” Knoll said it was a “disconcerting experience...being out in the field in the morning and seeing an action take place and then hearing it described at the military briefing in Saigon in the afternoon and finding it very difficult to reconcile.” Knoll blamed the White House’s tendency to believe “we’re better off if we make it look better than it is because maybe we’re just about to turn the corner. Maybe three weeks from now or six months from now everything really is going to be alright and then we’ll look fine.” He added that the “incredible catalogue of reassuring statements on Vietnam that goes back to the early 60s.... look silly in retrospect. Preposterous in retrospect.” However, he claimed, “the depressing thing is that the same kind of statement is still being made.”¹⁰¹¹

The President’s credibility problems extended to his heir-apparent, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, as well. Former communications director for the White House and *Newsweek* editor Bill Moyers appeared on *Late Night* with guest host David Frost in July and was forced into the uncomfortable position of defending the President’s—and Hubert Humphrey’s—credibility against attacks by former Kennedy and current McCarthy speechwriter Dick Goodwin. Moyers created the trap for himself before Goodwin joined the set by saying that Humphrey would have to “to rebuild the image of Washington, which I think in the country right now is not a very exciting one.” When questioned, Moyers added: “The war in Vietnam has turned majority of the people against Washington and against the administration.” Frost cornered Moyers, noting that a few weeks before Moyers had “suggested that [Humphrey] was just about to lay bare his private doubts about Vietnam,” but that Humphrey had not done so and, in fact, “he doesn’t seem to have any.” Moyers demurred—and deepened the hole—by saying that Humphrey was “in a bit

¹⁰¹¹ Barbara Coleman, Erwin Knoll, “Here’s Barbara: Credibility Gap,” *Here’s Barbara*, WJLA (ABC), Washington, DC, 28 June 1968, Video #1331, “Here’s Barbara on Credibility Gap,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

of a strait-jacket” and couldn’t say what he really thought about Vietnam while he was part of the administration. When Richard Goodwin emerged after the commercial break, he savaged Moyers on Humphrey’s credibility. He said: “It’s extraordinary that the Vice President has so many supporters who seem to be for him on the basis that he hasn’t meant anything he’s said in the last five years.” In response to nervous laughter from the audience, Goodwin recounted all of the recent statements of support Humphrey had made about the war. Goodwin added that Humphrey, who owed his political fortunes to the Johnson camp, “has an enormous handicap to overcome.” Moyers only ended the assault by saying that the sooner “the next President can terminate the war in Vietnam, the sooner he will have 30 billion dollars a year” to fix America’s domestic problems. The suggestion of ending the war drew enthusiastic applause.¹⁰¹²

Continued upheaval in the Democratic Party had a negative effect on public sentiments about the Party. In late July 1968, a plurality of Americans (46 percent) believed Vietnam was “the most important problem” facing the United States in this election year. When asked which party would do a better job in dealing with this problem, a plurality (37 percent) of Americans who had an opinion believed the Republicans would do a better job (with 33 percent believing it would make no difference).¹⁰¹³ By August, nearly 42 percent of Americans who had an opinion believed the Republicans would do a better job.¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹² David Frost, Bill Moyers (*Newsweek*), Dick Goodwin, “*Tonight Show* featuring guests: Bill Moyers & Dick Goodwin,” *Tonight Show*, NBC, 5 July 1968, Video #1401, “*Tonight*, with Bill Moyers & Richard Goodwin on campaign 68,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁰¹³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968- 0765: 1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 18-23 July 1968), 9-14.

¹⁰¹⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968- 0766: 1968 Presidential Election/Birth Control* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 August 1968), 7-11.

Americans were also clearly providing the next President with a policy prescription. When asked about an unnamed candidate who promised they would “turn over more of the fighting in Vietnam to the South Vietnamese and that as of next January 1 the U.S. should withdraw some of our troops,” 78 percent of Americans who had an opinion said that they would vote for this candidate.¹⁰¹⁵

Many supporters of the war in the media, who had been dispirited since the President’s withdrawal from the Presidential race, remained dejected. John Chamberlain decried the victory of peace candidate Paul O’Dwyer in the New York Democratic Senatorial primary as yet another indication that “our Vietnamese engagement has been lost.” Admonishing the American public he added “As a people, we have declared not our inability to win the war but our unwillingness to pay the price that would be demanded of us to do it.” Citing all of the candidates who had rejected the war, Chamberlain claimed that the “domino theory” had swept the American political landscape. Chamberlain also attacked Johnson for having failed to use the measures required to win the war. “The enemy was assured at all times of a steady flow of weapons and food from Soviet Russia and Red China,” he claimed. Recounting the administration’s argument that Vietnam was a test of U.S. commitment, Chamberlain warned that, in 1969, “every other nation in the world, whether large or small, will be seeking new alliances, or new sources of internal cohesion and strength.” Chamberlain suggested that the American public ask its Presidential candidates, “Which one... will be able to give West Germany and Japan, Thailand

¹⁰¹⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968- 0765: 1968 Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 18-23 July 1968), 16.

and Israel, Venezuela and Brazil, Spain and India, the reassurance that we can reform our lines and keep at least some of the dominoes from falling.”¹⁰¹⁶

A Soviet crackdown in Czechoslovakia began to breathe new life into those in the media who supported the war. Joseph Alsop used the crackdown in Czechoslovakia to attack “those men of the left whose indignation waxes so hot when it is a question of Western or even American ‘imperialism.’” Unlike dissenters in America, Alsop wrote, Soviets “do not parrot twaddle about the ‘discredited domino theory.’” The Soviets, Alsop claimed, “knew that sooner or later the dominoes would begin tumbling in Eastern Europe if freedom was permitted to be reborn there.” Moreover, Alsop claimed, this new Soviet boldness was born of “the kind of collapse of American resolve that Sens. Eugene McCarthy, Ted Kennedy and others now are seeking to promote?”¹⁰¹⁷

The Democratic Convention

The Tet Offensive and the dramatic political changes that followed in Washington substantially muted radical demonstrators. The movement reemerged at the Democratic National Convention held in Chicago in August 1968. Just as in previous radical protests, the demonstrators in Chicago were demonstrating in opposition to the ideology of containment and its distorting effect on foreign and domestic policy in the United States. While these demonstrations raged outside, Democratic Party leaders inside the Convention debated the applicability of the ideology of containment to the Vietnam War and whether to compromise the goal of containment of Communism in Southeast Asia to end the war. Both the demonstrations

¹⁰¹⁶ John Chamberlain, “The Domino Theory Takes Over At Home,” *Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, FL, 2 July 1968, 12-A

¹⁰¹⁷ Joseph Alsop, “Matter of Fact: Harsh Recall to Reality,” *Washington Post*, Washington, DC, *Daytona Beach Sunday News-Journal*, Daytona Beach, FL, 25 August 1968, 2C.

and this debate alienated the American public, alienation on which the Republican Party capitalized.

It gradually became evident that Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey would lose the election, in large part due to the same credibility issues that had ended the Johnson Presidency. In response, Humphrey and the President made a series of eleventh-hour moves designed to bridge the divide between antiwar Democrats and those supporters of Humphrey who wanted to hold on in Vietnam for a more favorable settlement. In the end, while this closed the gap between Humphrey and Nixon, it was not enough to convince a majority of Americans to support Humphrey.

The protesters at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, like those in earlier antiwar protests, were primarily young radicals, many waving Viet Cong and other Communist flags.¹⁰¹⁸ The security forces that Mayor Daley assembled to meet the protests included over 7,000 U.S. Army National Guard soldiers. The violent clash between demonstrators and these security forces dominated coverage of the Convention.¹⁰¹⁹ Several photographers and reporters were caught up in the violence, magnifying this effect.¹⁰²⁰ These demonstrations were preceded by demonstrations at over 100 different colleges, including violent confrontations between police and students at Columbia University.¹⁰²¹

The demonstrations at the Chicago convention had two important political effects. First, Democratic Party leaders concluded that the violence in Chicago hurt Hubert Humphrey's

¹⁰¹⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 594-596.

¹⁰¹⁹ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 515, 517.

¹⁰²⁰ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 515, 517.

¹⁰²¹ Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 260-261.

chances against Republican nominee Richard Nixon.¹⁰²² Second, McCarthy supporter Sam Brown later said “the Chicago episode [was] a disaster that alienated many Americans sympathetic to the antiwar movement.”¹⁰²³

Inside the convention, an equally tumultuous political struggle was taking place over the position the Democratic Party platform would take on the Vietnam War. Antiwar Democrats argued that the Party should support abandoning the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia in order to end the war. Senator J. William Fulbright argued before the platform committee that the platform should acknowledge that:

...the war in Vietnam is essentially a civil war which involves no direct threat to the national security of the United States. That the war cannot be won without running unacceptable risks, including the risk of a world war. But that, nonetheless, a unilateral American withdrawal would leave a situation of confusion and disorder in South Vietnam. Accordingly, the Democratic Party commits itself to a policy of seeking, through the Paris peace negotiations a peace settlement based on the principles of self-determination and neutralization.¹⁰²⁴

Senator George McGovern, representing supporters of slain candidate Robert Kennedy, argued that the platform should contain a pledge that the United States would “cease our opposition to participation by the NLF in the government of South Vietnam.”¹⁰²⁵ McGovern also proposed that the platform contain a “60-days-to-peace” plan that included the immediate withdrawal of

¹⁰²² Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 262.

¹⁰²³ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 595.

¹⁰²⁴ NBC Evening News, “Vietnam / Fulbright / McGovern / Nelson,” *NBC Evening News*, 20 August 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=441560>.

¹⁰²⁵ NBC Evening News, “Vietnam / Fulbright / McGovern / Nelson,” *NBC Evening News*, 20 August 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=441560>.

275,000 U.S. troops. Senator McCarthy's camp argued only that the platform should include support for Communist participation in a coalition government in South Vietnam.¹⁰²⁶

While Vice President Hubert Humphrey was less specific about his own policy prescription, he rejected suggestions that would end the war without containing Communist expansion into South Vietnam. Humphrey implied that such suggestions would alienate the American people, reminding his fellow Democrats that none of the urgent domestic needs of the country would be addressed if Richard Nixon became President. Humphrey even suggested that he might make either of his two opponents his running-mate. Humphrey also promised he would “do all that is humanly possible without regard to my own political future to bring...peace as speedily and as honorably as I can.” The emphasis on “honorably” separated him from the other two men, who had laid out terms for ending the war that he—and he believed the American people—would not accept.¹⁰²⁷

Johnson administration officials used the opportunity of the platform committee to once more use the ideology of containment to argue for continued U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Secretary of State Dean Rusk took the extraordinary step of appearing before the Democratic Party platform committee—presumably on behalf of the Humphrey camp—to argue against making any concessions to the North Vietnamese a part of the Democratic Party platform. Rusk equated antiwar recommendations to saying, “Give the aggressor another bite—

¹⁰²⁶ United Press International, “No Concessions, Rusk Urges Panel,” United Press International, Washington, DC, *News and Courier*, Charleston, SC, 21 August 1968, 3A.

¹⁰²⁷ Frank Reynolds, Howard K. Smith, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, Hubert Humphrey, “Sen. McCarthy, Sen. McGovern, and Vice President Humphrey Closing Statements to the California Delegation,” *ABC Coverage of the Democratic Convention*, Part II, ABC, 27 August 1968, Video #1851, “HHH, Sen. George McGovern & Sen. Eugene McCarthy address California deleg.,” Audiovisual Material, Motion Pictures, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

perhaps he'll be satisfied." Rusk also argued against saying, "It's too far away," "It's not our business," or "Security treaties should be ignored if they come to involve cost, pain and sacrifice." Instead, Rusk argued, the platform should state the Party's desire for "an early but honorable peace that will enable the peoples of Asia to live together in freedom." Rusk also argued there was no need to debate the "domino theory" since the Communists were already active across Southeast Asia. He added that events in Southeast Asia were directly tied to U.S. and world security.¹⁰²⁸

The heart of Rusk's critique of proposed peace planks in the Democratic platform was that "to send out the signal that security treaties do not mean what they say would be, in my judgment, an invitation to disaster." Rusk argued that the Democratic Party should not "accept every no from Hanoi as a final answer and move from one position to another until their appetite and ambition are satisfied." Nor should the platform, Rusk added, spell out "the bargaining strategy we would like our negotiators to employ."¹⁰²⁹

In the end, the Democratic platform reflected President Johnson's and Vice President Humphrey's wishes. As House Majority Leader Carl Albert would recall in an oral history a year later, Johnson had "selected the temporary and permanent officers of the convention, and everything was run by the National Committee through him."¹⁰³⁰

Meanwhile, the Republican Party was united in its belief in the ideology of containment and its applicability to the war in Vietnam. At a news conference before his nomination at the

¹⁰²⁸ United Press International, "No Concessions, Rusk Urges Panel," United Press International, Washington, DC, *News and Courier*, Charleston, SC, 21 August 1968, 3A.

¹⁰²⁹ Special to The New York Times, "Proposed Plank on Vietnam and Rusk Statement," *New York Times*, 21 August 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993), 33.

¹⁰³⁰ Transcript, Carl Albert Oral History Interview IV, 13 August 1969, by Dorothy Pierce McSweeney, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 9-14.

Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, Richard Nixon made it clear he had no intentions of surrendering in Vietnam. Nixon insisted: “I do *not* think the war is unwinnable” (emphasis is the candidate’s). He added that he did not want to be President “for the purpose of presiding over the destruction of the credibility of the American power throughout this world.” Nixon intended to compel the North Vietnamese to negotiate through more forceful military action.¹⁰³¹

In his acceptance speech after his nomination at the Convention, Nixon reiterated the theme that Vietnam was a test of U.S. commitments worldwide. The election would decide “not only the future of America,” Nixon insisted, “but the future of peace and freedom of the world for the last third of the Twentieth Century.” Nixon also renewed his pledge to use more forceful action in Vietnam, saying that it was time for “new leadership in America” when “the strongest nation in the world can be tied down for four years by a war in Vietnam with no end in sight.” Nixon promised both to “bring an honorable end to the war in Vietnam” and to create a foreign policy that would “prevent more Vietnams.”¹⁰³²

The press clearly believed that Nixon would be the more aggressive candidate in Vietnam. Global News Service journalist Robert Lucas wrote that the administration believed Nixon’s nomination would give the administration additional bargaining power in Vietnam. Lucas wrote that “Nixon is anathema to the Russians, a reaction resulting from Nixon’s vaunted anti-Communist position over many years.” Lucas added that Nixon’s “anti-Communist stance has been his most consistent ideological commitment over the years.” Lucas noted that the

¹⁰³¹ Frank Reynolds, “Republican National Convention / Nixon,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 06 August 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=1553>.

¹⁰³² Richard Nixon, “Highlights of Nixon Speech Accepting GOP Nomination,” Associated Press, Miami Beach, FL, *Evening News*, Newburgh, NY, 9 August 1968, 9A.

former Vice President had advocated sending U.S. troops to assist the French during their rout in Indochina. Lucas also noted that Nixon had ever since criticized “U.S. war policy in Vietnam as vacillating and inadequate” and attacked the “‘piecemeal’ and tardy deployment of U.S. military forces in Vietnam.” Lucas also noted that Nixon wanted “more intense employment of airpower in the war as an alternative to ‘ground forces’ in winning.” Lucas concluded that these convictions were a result of Nixon’s strong belief in the “‘domino theory’ of resistance to North Vietnamese aggression as necessary to prevent a Red engulfment of Asia.”¹⁰³³

However, Nixon’s campaign was not just a campaign to find an “honorable end” to the war that preserved the goals of containment of Communism in Southeast Asia. It was also a campaign against radical demonstrators. Richard Nixon repeatedly lashed out against demonstrators as prolonging the war in 1967. As a Presidential candidate, Nixon campaigned against “lawlessness,” which the media clearly understood to mean radical and civil rights demonstrators. In a June 1968 article, syndicated columnist Andrew Tully understood the issue to be “violence in the streets.” Tully noted that the antiviolence plank in the Republican platform was simply “We will not tolerate violence!” with the underlining and exclamation point added by the platform committee. Tully added that, while this plank wouldn’t please academics, “it warms the [cockles] of Main Street’s heart” to hear a candidate declare that the United States (quoting the text of the platform) “must reestablish the principle that men are accountable for what they do.” Tully made it clear who Nixon was talking about; he wrote that it was “not the whole country that is sick, but only a noisy and vicious minority.” Tully concluded that campaigning against radical demonstrators was a winning issue for Republicans.¹⁰³⁴

¹⁰³³ Robert W. Lucas, “Nixon May Unite Democrats,” Global News Service, Miami Beach, FL, *Evening News*, Newburgh, NY, 9 August 1968, 9A.

¹⁰³⁴ Andrew Tully, “National Whirligig,” Miami Beach, FL, *Reading Eagle*, Reading, PA, 8 August 1968, 22.

Tully was right that the American people were concerned about this issue. In September, a plurality of the American people—42 percent of Americans—continued to see Vietnam as the most important issue. However, 34 percent of Americans cited various other issues that were related to radical dissenters or demonstrators, including “crime,” “juvenile delinquency [and] hippies,” “unrest in this country,” “college demonstrations,” “draft card burning,” “anti-war demonstrations,” or “youth protests.” Moreover, of those who thought either party would do better in handling this problem, 62 percent believed Republicans would “do a better job.”¹⁰³⁵ Further, while many Democrats and many in the media decried the police violence against protesters in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, 65 percent of Americans who had an opinion approved of “the way the Chicago police dealt with the young people who were registering their protest against the Vietnam war at the time of the Democratic convention.”¹⁰³⁶

Richard Nixon was trying to appeal to the majority of the American electorate that decried radical demonstrators and their opposition to the Cold War consensus. In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Nixon said that he was running because “the greatest tradition of the rule of law is plagued by unprecedented lawlessness” and because “the President of the United States cannot travel abroad or to any major city at home without fear of a hostile demonstration.” He added: “A nation that can’t keep the peace at home won’t be trusted to keep the peace abroad.” Nixon also directly confronted those who he said claimed “law and order is the code word for racism,” saying that the Republican goal was “justice for every

¹⁰³⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0767: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 1-6 September 1968), 8-13.

¹⁰³⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0767: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 1-6 September 1968), 20.

American.” Stealing an argument from radicals themselves, he added that Black Americans “don’t want to be a colony in a nation.”¹⁰³⁷

The Democrats’ disastrous national convention in Chicago and the nomination of Richard Nixon as the Republican candidate reinvigorated supporters of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. These supporters returned to the use of the containment of Communism to justify the war. In August, the House Armed Service Committee’s Subcommittee on National Defense Posture issued a report on the Vietnam conflict that argued that the war in Vietnam was caused by aggression by North Vietnam. The report rejected “the view espoused by the naïve victims of Communist propaganda that the struggle in Vietnam is a civil war.”¹⁰³⁸ The Subcommittee also supported the domino theory, writing:

Vietnam represents only one of many small nations in Southeast Asia marked for Communist conquest and is the key to all of Indochina. Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan and unarmed Japan will quickly follow if South Vietnam should lose its struggle to remain free from Communist domination.¹⁰³⁹

¹⁰³⁷ Richard M. Nixon, “Highlights of Nixon Speech Accepting GOP Nomination,” Miami Beach, FL, Associated Press, *Evening News*, Newburgh, NY, 9 August 1968, 9A.

¹⁰³⁸ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, *Review of the Vietnam Conflict and its Impact on U.S. Military Commitments Abroad*, by the Special Subcommittee on National Defense Posture (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office , 24 August 1968), 6-7.

¹⁰³⁹ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, *Review of the Vietnam Conflict and its Impact on U.S. Military Commitments Abroad*, by the Special Subcommittee on National Defense Posture (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office , 24 August 1968), 6-7.

This report concluded, “Without this vital external assistance, most of which comes from Red China and the Soviet Union, North Vietnam would be forced to end the war within a relatively short period.”¹⁰⁴⁰

After the nominating conventions, Richard Nixon had a commanding lead over Hubert Humphrey. Over two thirds of Americans believed that Nixon could do “a better job of dealing with the Vietnam War” than Hubert Humphrey.¹⁰⁴¹ By September, Humphrey had narrowed that gap only slightly, with 64 percent still believing Nixon would do a better job with the war. Moreover, while 62 percent of Americans who had an opinion saw Nixon as a “Hawk” on the war,¹⁰⁴² they did not necessarily expect him to escalate the war. When asked what Nixon would do about the war if elected, only 16 percent of Americans who had an opinion expected him to escalate the war. The largest percentage, 44 percent, took the former Vice President at his word, agreeing that he would “try to end the war.” However, Americans also understood that Nixon’s pledge to find an “honorable end” to the war was not a pledge to withdraw precipitously; only seven percent of respondents expected Nixon to de-escalate the conflict. Nor did Nixon appeal to Americans only on the issue of the Vietnam War. When asked for whom they would vote if a negotiated settlement were reached in Paris, a plurality of Americans who had an opinion, 47 percent, still said they would vote for Nixon.¹⁰⁴³

¹⁰⁴⁰ US House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, *Review of the Vietnam Conflict and its Impact on U.S. Military Commitments Abroad*, by the Special Subcommittee on National Defense Posture (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office , 24 August 1968), 17-18.

¹⁰⁴¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968- 0766: 1968 Presidential Election/Birth Control* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 7-12 August 1968), 15-16.

¹⁰⁴² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0767: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 1-6 September 1968), 21, 22-23.

¹⁰⁴³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0768: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 September 1968), 8-11.

While Nixon enjoyed a commanding lead, the administration continued to be plagued by attacks on its credibility. The *New York Times* accused the President of dishonesty in not truly supporting Vice President Humphrey's Presidential bid. The *Times* wrote that Johnson was sabotaging the campaign and trying to keep the war going with "an emotional defense of his old Vietnam policies." The *Times* wrote that "Johnson spoke out again this week on Vietnam [in] tough terms that can only diminish prospects for progress in the Paris peace talks and undermine whatever efforts Vice President Humphrey may be trying to make to advance a more moderate Vietnam position." Likewise, the *Times* wrote, Johnson "frustrated" Humphrey's effort to unify the party during the platform committee meetings with "a hard-line Presidential address before the Veterans of Foreign Wars." The *Times* was also roundly critical of the President's continued use of containment to justify the war, including the "discredited domino theory," the "flimsy pretext of a SEATO obligation," the "highly dubious argument" that Vietnam was vital to U.S. security, and "his vow not to stop the bombing of North Vietnam without assurances of reciprocity." The *Times* added that the President contradicted "two Secretaries of Defense" by insisting that a bombing halt would "permit the enemy to increase its capacity severalfold [sic] in ten days" and increase U.S. casualties. The *Times* called this talk "intemperate rhetoric" and a "retreat from the President's own encouraging initiative of last March 31." The *Times* concluded that this talk was deliberately intended to frustrate the efforts of both "American negotiators in Paris [and] the Democratic nominee for the Presidency."¹⁰⁴⁴

As the Presidential election approached, even some Democrats ran against the lack of Presidential credibility. Jesse Unruh, Speaker of the California Assembly and Hubert

¹⁰⁴⁴ New York Times, "Not Much Help From L. B. J.," *New York Times*, 14 September 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993), 30.

Humphrey's honorary campaign vice chairman in California, unleashed a broadside against the administration's dishonesty during a speech that was excerpted on the *CBS Evening News*. Unruh said that "many people have lost faith in this administration." He warned: "No government can survive if it is not built upon the sound basis of truth and credibility." While Unruh claimed that the administration had failed by embarking "upon its mistaken path in Vietnam," he claimed its larger failure was that "it consistently and categorically misled the people about the progress of the war and its purposes." Unruh believed that the next President must hold to "a policy of utmost candor with the American people." He added: "Politicians have got to start leveling with the people. They've got to stop managing the news as if justifying their policies was their only mission in life."¹⁰⁴⁵

While many in the media and the American public had abandoned support of the President, they had not abandoned the war. When asked in late September if they thought "the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam, 59 percent of Americans who had an opinion answered "yes." But when asked to describe their own position on the war, 53 percent of those who answered still called themselves "Hawk[s]."¹⁰⁴⁶ Moreover, when asked whether they would be "more likely to vote for" Nixon or Humphrey if each "were to take a stronger peace position on Vietnam," two thirds of respondents answered "no" regardless of which candidate they supported.¹⁰⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴⁵ Harry Reasoner, "Unruh / Government Criticism," *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 10 October 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=197853>.

¹⁰⁴⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0769: Presidential Election/Political Parties* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 26 September-1 October 1968), 15.

¹⁰⁴⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0768: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 September 1968), 11-12.

On 30 September, with Humphrey lagging badly in national polls behind Nixon, the Vice President made a dramatic pledge designed to capture the votes of those former supporters of McCarthy and Kennedy who wanted a negotiated settlement in Vietnam—even if it meant compromising the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia. The speech itself was the work of Johnson aide George Ball who had left the White House to help Humphrey’s faltering campaign.¹⁰⁴⁸ In a nationally televised speech taped in Salt Lake City, Utah, the Vice President promised that, if elected, he would “stop the bombing of the north as an acceptable risk for peace because I believe it could lead to success in the negotiations and thereby shorten the war.” He did, however, equivocate by saying he would look for some reciprocal action, such as North Vietnam restoring the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam, first. However, his aides described this as “window-dressing,” claiming Humphrey was committed to a bombing halt. Both aides and Humphrey himself hoped that the move would be interpreted by former McCarthy and Kennedy supporters in the Democratic Party as a break from President Johnson.¹⁰⁴⁹

While Humphrey painted this as taking a risk for peace, it was not that risky—at least in terms of domestic politics. When Americans were asked only two weeks earlier if the United States should “stop all bombing of North Vietnam but with the understanding that if after one or two months the North Vietnamese [do not] begin to remove their soldiers from South Vietnam

¹⁰⁴⁸ Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview II, 9 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 28-30.

¹⁰⁴⁹ R. W. Apple, Jr. [Special to *The New York Times*], “HUMPHREY VOWS HALT IN BOMBING IF HANOI REACTS: A ‘RISK FOR PEACE’ ...,” *New York Times*, 1 October 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

that the U.S. would then decide whether to bomb all of North Vietnam including the cities,” 55 percent of Americans who had an opinion agreed with this course of action.¹⁰⁵⁰

However, the equivocation in Humphrey’s pledge to stop the bombing opened him to attacks on his credibility. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, reader John Fisher asked of this caveat to a bombing halt, “Does the Vice President attempt to fool the American people deliberately with such a declaration.” Harkening to earlier attacks on Johnson’s true desire for negotiations, Fisher added: “The ‘new’ declaration by Mr. Humphrey is once again conditioned by the same Johnsonian hoax that peace depends on the doings of the North Vietnamese.” Fisher also reminded his fellow readers: “Mr. Humphrey has been endorsing Johnson’s and his own bombing policy for years and as recently as during the Chicago convention, in clear opposition to the McCarthy platform against the bombing.” Fisher concluded by calling the pledge a “smoke screen” and “a late-hour maneuver to get the votes from peace-minded Americans.”¹⁰⁵¹

Still, this pledge did seem to help Humphrey with voters. In mid-October, when asked who would do “a better job of dealing with the Vietnam War,” only 61 percent of those Americans who chose a candidate chose Nixon, a slip of three points from September.¹⁰⁵²

On 1 November 1968, in another last-minute attempt to buoy the Vice President’s campaign, the President announced a bombing halt across all of North Vietnam.¹⁰⁵³ In the end

¹⁰⁵⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0768: 1968 Presidential Election/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 September 1968), 8-11.

¹⁰⁵¹ John L. Fisher, “Humphrey Maneuver,” *New York Times*, 18 October 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 46.

¹⁰⁵² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0770: Presidential Election/Political Party* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 17-22 October 1968), 19.

these two moves would cause a surge in the polls for Humphrey, but not be enough to put him past Nixon in the election. Hubert Humphrey lost the election by a half-million votes.¹⁰⁵⁴

President-Elect Nixon

The election of Richard Nixon was not a national repudiation of the Cold War consensus or a vote to quit the war in Vietnam and abandon the goal of containment of Communism in Southeast Asia. Candidates across the country who had run against the ideology of containment were soundly defeated. Moreover, Richard Nixon was understood by the media and the American people to be a Cold Warrior and “Hawk” on the war in Vietnam. Still, the American public gave Nixon a clear policy prescription as he prepared to take office: begin to hand the war over to the South Vietnamese and gradually bring U.S. troops home as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was ready to take the fight.

As President-elect Richard Nixon prepared to take office, it is clear that he understood that the framework for the debate of the war had shifted, with supporters continuing to use containment to justify the war but opponents now attacking the President’s credibility; in response Nixon’s administration-in-waiting moved to shore up his credibility before he took office.

The 1968 election was a repudiation of those candidates who opposed the Cold War consensus. For instance, Earl Faircloth, conservative Florida Attorney General, was defeated in the Democratic Primary for the U.S. Senate after running a campaign founded on moving beyond

¹⁰⁵³ Max Frankel [Special to The New York Times], “Bomb Halt Buys Humphrey but Effect Is Unclear,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993), 21.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 514-527.

a foreign policy based on containment.¹⁰⁵⁵ New York City Council President Paul O'Dwyer lost his bid for the U.S. Senate against Republican incumbent Jacob K. Javits. O'Dwyer's campaign was founded on an attack against Javits' use of containment to justify the war in Vietnam and, in the later days of the campaign, against the ideology of containment itself.¹⁰⁵⁶ Even perennial Congressional dissenter Wayne Morse lost his reelection bid in Oregon to relatively unknown Republican challenger Robert Packwood. Packwood ran directly against Wayne Morse's statements disputing the application of the ideology of containment to the war in Vietnam. At one campaign stop, for instance, Packwood decried Morse's statement that "our aid in Vietnam is identical to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia." Even a tacit endorsement and highly favorable news segment on *ABC Evening News* by reporter Jim Burnes was not enough to save Morse's Senate seat.¹⁰⁵⁷

In the aftermath of the election, supporters of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam clearly believed they had won a victory and lashed out at their vanquished opponents. Just a few days after the election, syndicated columnist Holmes Alexander poked fun at Eugene McCarthy, writing that "a few months ago, it was heresy to express agnosticism about the divinity of Sen. Eugene McCarthy." Now, Alexander wrote, McCarthy was a "fallen angel to all except the most pointy-headed extremists of the Lunatic Left."¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁵ Morris McLemore, "Nation Needs Broad Review of Foreign Policy," Tallahassee, FL, *Miami News*, 17 May 1968, 6-A

¹⁰⁵⁶ Maurice Carroll, "O'Dwyer Calls for U.N. to Arrange a Cease-Fire," *New York Times*, 10 July 1968, 21, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993).

¹⁰⁵⁷ Jim Burnes, Frank Reynolds, "Oregon Senate Race," *ABC Evening News*, 14 October 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=69>.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Homes Alexander, "On the Political Front," Washington, DC, *Reading Eagle*, Reading, PA, 19 November 1968, 19.

Supporters of the war also reasserted that the containment of Communism justified intervention in Vietnam. A few days before the inauguration, syndicated columnist Ernest Cuneo claimed that the Philippines' drift away from the United States and toward Communist China was yet another proof of the domino theory. Philippine Foreign Secretary General Carlos P. Romulo, Cuneo wrote, had declared that "the American people will not consent to involving [their] troops in Asia" after Vietnam. As a result, Romulo suggested that the Philippines find "alternate fallback arrangements" with Communist China. Cuneo wrote that "this de facto recognition of Peking and simultaneous expression of hope of withdrawal of the naval and air power from U.S. bases amounts to a breathtaking reversal of the Philippines' basic strategy and policy." Cuneo wrote: "Clearly, the dominoes in Asia are beginning to wobble... the Philippines may have been lost by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington."¹⁰⁵⁹

U.S. News & World Report made it clear in an article on their expectations for the new President that they expected not a withdrawal but victory in Vietnam. In an article about a poll conducted by the magazine, *U.S. News & World Report* wrote that Americans wanted the President to end the war in Vietnam, but they did not want "abject surrender." One respondent was quoted as saying: "I want Nixon to settle the war, but I want an honorable peace." Another respondent wanted an escalation of the war: "Nixon will be tougher in prosecuting the war, and will listen more to the advice of military leaders." Another said: "Nixon will go into Vietnam and win this war as quickly as possible with all the military force needed." A respondent from Houston said: "I hope the war gets top priority. I want to see it get headed toward a logical conclusion. People just want to see an end in sight." Another respondent echoed the lesson of

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ernest Cuneo, "Tumbling Dominoes: Manila Signals End To Pacific Alliance," North American Newspaper Alliance, Washington, DC, *Youngstown Vindicator*, Youngstown, OH, 11 January 1969, 10.

Munich in his hopes for the new administration: “Nixon will end the war with comparatively little appeasement.” Another said: “Nixon might get tougher with Saigon.”¹⁰⁶⁰ According to *U.S. News & World Report*, America had voted for a more aggressive strategy to compel the north to end the war.

The Nixon administration-in-waiting understood that President Johnson’s loss of credibility had been his undoing, and moved to shore up Nixon’s credibility before he took office. From the very earliest interviews with reporters, members of the incoming administration emphasized that they would be transparent and honest with the American people. In an interview on the *NBC Evening News*, new press secretary Herb Klein claimed that he was part of a “major effort by the President-elect to present to the American people all of the facts possible.” Klein added that this was part of the President-elect’s pledge to bring “truth in government.” He added: “Truth will become the hallmark of the Nixon administration.... I’m charged directly by the President to emphasize to every department of government that more facts should be made available.” Klein assured the American people: “We’ll be able to eliminate any kind of possibility of a credibility gap in this administration.”¹⁰⁶¹

The American people had, by a narrow margin, elected Richard Nixon to bring an “honorable end” to the war, which they understood to mean ending U.S. military intervention in Vietnam in a way that preserved the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia. Immediately after the election, the American people did not give the President-elect a clear

¹⁰⁶⁰ US News & World Report, “WHAT’S EXPECTED OF A NEW PRESIDENT: Nationwide Survey,” *US News & World Report*, 16 December 1968, 32, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 3, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹⁰⁶¹ NBC Evening News, “Nixon / Klein,” *NBC Evening News*, 25 November 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=440816&Row=1>.

policy prescription for how to achieve that goal.¹⁰⁶² However, as the inauguration approached, a popular consensus on the desired course for the war in Vietnam began to emerge. In a Gallup Poll in December 1968, by a narrow margin, Americans agreed that the United States “should continue to supply military supplies to South Vietnam but that we should let them take over the fighting and make all the decisions about peace and dealings with the Vietcong.”¹⁰⁶³ A few weeks later, 64 percent of Americans who had an opinion agreed that “the time has come to begin to reduce month by month the number of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam.”¹⁰⁶⁴ This policy prescription—arming and incrementally handing the war over to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam while gradually reducing the number of U.S. troops in the country—would become the heart of Richard Nixon’s policy in Vietnam after his inauguration. He would call it “Vietnamization.”

On the eve of the inauguration of President-elect Richard Nixon, President Johnson delivered his final State of the Union Address. In addressing the future of the Cold War, the President once more in his final public address stubbornly justified his war in Vietnam using the ideology of military containment. At the end of the bloodiest year in the Vietnam War, he said that peace was closer than it had ever been since “North Vietnam began its invasion with its regular forces more than 4 years ago.” He also said that the United States had proved “that America cares about their [South Vietnam’s] freedom, and it also cares about America’s own vital interests in Asia and throughout the Pacific.” Likewise, the North Vietnamese now knew

¹⁰⁶² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0771: Elections/Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 9-14 November 1968), 17-18.

¹⁰⁶³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1968-0772: Richard Nixon/The Year 1969* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 5-10 December 1968), 6-11.

¹⁰⁶⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 773* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 1-6 January 1969), 9.

“that they cannot achieve their aggressive purposes by force.” As the President closed, he begrudgingly thanked Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and Senator Richard B. Russell. He said he also appreciated “the most generous cooperation from the leaders of the Republican Party in the Congress of the United States, Senator Dirksen and Congressman Gerald Ford, the Minority Leader.”¹⁰⁶⁵ He did not thank his own party or his once close friend Senator J. William Fulbright.

In late summer 1967, two Associated Press reporters questioned the administration’s account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident just as administration officials were making their boldest predictions yet about success in Vietnam. Soon after, in an effort to weaken the administration’s insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—the Senate Foreign Relations Committee made the fateful decision to hold hearings in 1968 not on the administration’s use of the containment of Communism to justify the Vietnam War but on the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. These hearings would occur just as the Vietnamese Communists’ 1968 Tet Offensive called into question the credibility of the administration’s optimistic predictions from summer and fall 1967.

The convergence of these events would dramatically alter the course of the war. In the months after the beginning of the Tet Offensive, attacks on the administration’s use of military containment of Communism as a justification for U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, along with attacks on the broader ideology of military containment of Communism, became much less

¹⁰⁶⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 14, 1969,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-69*. Volume II, entry 676 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 1263-1270, accessed 6 January 2013, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1968-january-1969/01-14-1969.html>.

frequent. Instead, opponents of the war increasingly attacked the President's and the administration's credibility. At first, these attacks centered on the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and abuse of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. However, criticism quickly spread to attacks on the administration's credibility about virtually every facet of the war.

In 1964, the administration had used the Gulf of Tonkin incident as political impetus to gain passage of its insurance policy against Congressional dissent—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The Congress saw the Gulf of Tonkin incident as evidence of the failure of U.S. intervention in Vietnam up to that time to deter northern aggression; they saw the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—much like the Formosa Resolution or the Middle East Resolution—as an escalation in and of itself, designed to deter aggression. The American people saw the Gulf of Tonkin incident as a proof of the lessons of Munich that aggression breeds more aggression; in that context, both retaliatory air strikes and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were evidence that the Johnson administration had learned the lessons of Munich and was standing up to Communist aggression.

By 1968, both the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had taken on a completely different character. For the President, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution remained the administration's insurance policy against Congressional dissent. Whatever Members of Congress might claim they had understood the Resolution to mean or understood the President's intentions to be, the text of the Resolution was clear: it endorsed the President's decision to use whatever means he desired in Vietnam to stop Communist aggression in Southeast Asia. However, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was the chink in this otherwise impenetrable armor against Congressional dissent. In its haste to gain passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the administration had overlooked many inconsistencies in the reports from that night on 4 August

1964. Moreover, the administration had deliberately deceived the Congress as to many important facts about that night.

For the Congress, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was incontrovertible evidence that the administration had lied to obtain the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which had protected the President from Congressional dissent for over three years. Congressional opponents of the war would use the Gulf of Tonkin incident to undermine the power of this Resolution over Congress and leave the President with an impossible choice—end the war or end his Presidency. The President would ultimately choose the latter.

For other opponents of the war, the outcome of the 1968 Fulbright hearings was dramatic proof of the effectiveness of attacks on the administration's credibility. As a result, attacks on the administration's credibility rapidly expanded to virtually every facet of the war, quickly overwhelming the increasingly rare attacks on the administration's use of containment to justify the war—attacks that had for three years failed to turn Americans against the administration or its policies in Vietnam.

For the American public, revelations about the Gulf of Tonkin incident were just one more dramatic proof of the administration's deceptiveness. Beginning in late 1966, the media increasingly called into question the administration's credibility on a host of issues from civilian casualties caused by bombing the north to the administration's true willingness to negotiate with North Vietnam to end the war. Next, the Tet Offensive called into question all of the administration's optimistic claims from summer and fall 1967 about progress in the war. In this context, the revelations from the 1968 Fulbright hearings were simply the final straw.

Throughout this transformation of opposition to the war, the President, the administration, and other supporters of the war in Congress and the media continued to use the

containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. The American public agreed with the goal of containment of Communism and agreed that containment required continued U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Moreover, they roundly rejected those critics who attacked these justifications. However, they wanted the United States to be more aggressive in prosecuting the war and, more importantly, opponents of the war successfully convinced most Americans that the administration was lying to them.

The American public ultimately lost confidence in the credibility of President Johnson and his administration. This loss of credibility ultimately forced the President to withdraw from the Presidential race and sue for peace with North Vietnam. This collapse of credibility also extended to Vice President Hubert Humphrey and ultimately doomed his own bid for the Presidency.

While the majority of Americans rejected the President and his chosen successor, Hubert Humphrey, they continued to embrace the Cold War consensus and reject those who attacked it. In fact, this was exactly the conclusion that Senator J. William Fulbright and his staff had reached in late 1967 when they decided to hold hearings in 1968 on the Gulf of Tonkin incident rather than on the application of the ideology of containment to the war in Vietnam. Antiwar Presidential candidates like Robert F. Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy never reached this realization; they campaigned on a compromise peace that would threaten the goal of containment of Communism in Southeast Asia. The American people rejected these arguments, and the candidates who made them.

Former Vice President Richard Nixon won the Presidential election by identifying himself with the Cold War consensus and the ideology of containment. He also won the election by joining the American people in rejecting radical protesters who rejected the ideology of

containment. He succeeded in convincing a narrow majority of voters to trust him to bring the war to an “honorable end,” which most in the public and the press understood as an end to the war that preserved the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia.

The year 1968 marked the end of the foreign policy revolution that had begun in 1965. This foreign policy revolution had been led by a coterie of dissenters—including Members of Congress, academics, journalists and pundits, and radical protesters—who not only opposed the war, but sought to move the United States beyond a foreign policy based on the ideology of military containment of Communism. Senator J. William Fulbright had abandoned the goal of changing American foreign policy and instead decided to focus on the narrower objective of ending the war; he abandoned attacks on the ideology of containment and its application to Vietnam in favor of attacks on the President’s credibility. Almost all other opponents of the war quickly followed suit. The American public held to the Cold War consensus and rejected antiwar candidates who opposed the ideology of containment. While Congressional revolutionaries would continue to try to impose limits on Presidential power in foreign policy and radical protesters would drift toward militant opposition to America itself, attempts to turn the American public away from the Cold War consensus largely ceased after 1968.

The new framework for the debate over the Vietnam War established in 1968—between supporters using the ideology of containment to justify continued military intervention in Vietnam and opponents attacking administration credibility—would remain the framework for the debate through the end of the war. President Richard Nixon used troop withdrawals to counter attacks on his credibility, but the invasion of Cambodia, the disastrous invasion of Laos, the results of the My Lai massacre trial, massive demonstrations led by Vietnam veterans, and

the release of the Pentagon Papers would severely weaken Nixon's credibility and ultimately force him to end the Vietnam War.

Chapter 5 - Ending America's Vietnam War

As former Vice President Richard Nixon ascended to the Presidency, most Americans still embraced the ideology of military containment of Communism and agreed that containment required continued U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Nixon had won the Presidential election by identifying himself with these arguments, opposing radical dissenters who rejected these arguments, and promising to bring the war to an “honorable end.” Nixon and his supporters would continue to use the containment of Communism to justify continuing the war to what the President considered an “honorable” end.

By the time President Nixon took office, attacks on the use of military containment of Communism to justify the Vietnam War and on the broader foreign policy paradigm of military containment had virtually disappeared. Instead, antiwar arguments had narrowed to themes surrounding Presidential deceptiveness in the initiation, conduct, and resolution of the war. Initially, opponents of the war were unable to undermine the President's credibility on the war. However, after the Cambodian Incursion in 1970 and a series of blows to the President's credibility in 1971—including the weak performance of South Vietnamese forces during the Laos Incursion, the My Lai trial verdict, protests by the Vietnam Veterans against the War, and the release of the Pentagon Papers—attacks by opponents of the war on the President's credibility became increasingly effective.

The President was able to sustain his credibility with the majority of the American people through this period using the announcements of troop withdrawals from Vietnam—which most Americans perceived as the President's making good on his promise to end the war. These troop withdrawals bought the President the time he needed to try to negotiate a more favorable end to the war. However, Nixon could not employ this tactic indefinitely; there were a finite number of

troops in Vietnam to be withdrawn. Ultimately, Nixon ran out of troops to withdraw and was forced to accept a humiliating compromise peace that left North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam and set the stage for the ultimate destruction of that country.

Vietnamization

As soon as President Nixon took office, the framework for public debate of the war established in 1968—between supporters using containment to justify continuing the war and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—reasserted itself. Supporters of the war—including former President Johnson—argued that the war should continue until the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia could be assured. Opponents of the war initially struggled for ways to attack the war before settling on attacking the President’s failure to make good on his campaign pledge to end the war. To neutralize this attack, the Nixon administration began to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam. In essence, the President had “bought” credibility by withdrawing troops—a tactic Nixon would use repeatedly through the remainder of the war.

When President Richard Nixon took office in January 1969, over a half-million Americans were fighting in Vietnam and dying at a rate of over a thousand per month.¹⁰⁶⁶ Nixon was elected on the promise of “peace with honor.” His new strategy to achieve this goal was “Vietnamization”: drawing down American forces while gradually handing off the war to South Vietnamese forces.¹⁰⁶⁷ For the strategy to work, however, Nixon had to keep both the North Vietnamese Army and the American people at bay long enough to arm and train the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to stand alone.

¹⁰⁶⁶ John M. Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 15; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 267.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 284-285.

The American public in January 1969 was ambivalent about the war. Fifty-six percent of those Americans who had an opinion believed “the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam.”¹⁰⁶⁸ But most Americans were prepared to give the new President time to see his strategy through to completion in order to protect America’s gains in South Vietnam.

Just as during the Johnson Presidency, supporters of the war continued to use the containment of Communism to justify the war in Vietnam after the inauguration. A diagram from the Associated Press provided a simple explanation of the domino theory. The illustration was of a booted foot marked with the hammer and sickle of the Communist Party kicking over domino-shaped tiles marked with the names and outlines of the countries of Southeast Asia, beginning with Vietnam. The text in the diagram stated, “If Communism triumphs in one Asian country, the others will fall one by one.”¹⁰⁶⁹

The Associated Press story that accompanied this picture admitted that “the domino theory of a possible Communist takeover in Asia may be dead in official Washington” but claimed that it was still alive and well in Southeast Asian capitals and among many western diplomats. The story quoted one British diplomat as saying, “the name of the game is still dominoes.” The article also argued that SEATO had been founded by the United States “to prevent the dominoes from falling.” The article added: “Diplomats from several Asian countries said they feared the eventual U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam would signal a general disengagement in the region.” The AP article concluded by noting that diplomats believed the

¹⁰⁶⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 774: Israel and Middle East Nations/China/Environment* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 23-28 January 1969), 9.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Associated Press, “The Domino Theory,” Associated Press, Bangkok, *Gettysburg Times*, Gettysburg, PA, 25 January 1969, 7.

countries of Southeast Asia would fall if there was a lack of “American determination” and that this fall would include “Indonesia, the world’s fifth most populous nation.”¹⁰⁷⁰

Former President Lyndon Johnson also used containment to justify the war in Vietnam. In the February 1969 *Reader’s Digest*, Johnson argued that the credibility gap was caused not by his dishonesty but by “the gap between the intelligence information that a president deals with daily, and the public’s grasp of foreign events as reported by the media.” But his main purpose was to once more use containment to justify the war.¹⁰⁷¹ Recalling the lessons of Munich, Johnson wrote:

Had he [Winston Churchill] been heeded earlier, and had Britain...made a stand when Nazi troops moved on the Sudetenland, he would probably have been politically roasted for involvement in an obscure, faraway place—and for [putting] credence in a ridiculous “domino” theory that if the Sudetenland went, then Czechoslovakia, Poland, France—all of Europe—would not be far behind.¹⁰⁷²

Johnson added: “My profoundest hope is that America’s resistance in Vietnam will discourage future aggressors.”¹⁰⁷³ Johnson concluded: “The penalty I paid for facing duty in Vietnam was a high one, but it was nothing compared to the penalties that would have been exacted had I not done so.”¹⁰⁷⁴

¹⁰⁷⁰ Associated Press, “The Domino Theory,” Associated Press, Bangkok, *Gettysburg Times*, Gettysburg, PA, 25 January 1969, 7.

¹⁰⁷¹ Associated Press, “Had No Real Alternative In Vietnam, Writes LBJ,” Associated Press, New York, *Spartanburg Herald*, Spartanburg, SC, 28 January 1969,

¹⁰⁷² Associated Press, “Had No Real Alternative In Vietnam, Writes LBJ,” Associated Press, New York, *Spartanburg Herald*, Spartanburg, SC, 28 January 1969,

¹⁰⁷³ New York Times News Service, “Had To Stop Reds In Viet, LBJ Claims,” *New York Times News Service*, Washington, *Miami News*, Miami, FL, 29 January 1969, 20-C.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Associated Press, “Had No Real Alternative In Vietnam, Writes LBJ,” Associated Press, New York, *Spartanburg Herald*, Spartanburg, SC, 28 January 1969,

Meanwhile, opponents of the war in the media began to look for ways to attack the new President's credibility. Eric Sevareid of CBS expected the new administration to "fall into the same trap of its own making as did the Johnson regime." He added: "It can lose its credibility with the people...on Vietnam...by evasions and misleading promises and must be absolutely candid as it moves ahead."¹⁰⁷⁵ Quoting Senator Lyndon Johnson talking about the Truman administration, Sevareid added:

The American people are patient but they're not docile. Our national spirit and unity are not expendable. The public confidence cannot be taken for granted eternally. The clamor of public irritation and impatience cannot be brushed aside like a bothersome fly with a flip and snobbish judgment that the public is not informed. The American people have not lost faith in themselves or their democratic institutions, but they're tired of double-talk in Washington.¹⁰⁷⁶

Congressional dissenters, who had been so successful in undermining the Johnson administration by attacking its credibility between late 1966 and 1968, immediately began to look for similar ways to undermine the Nixon administration's credibility. In hearings on anti-ballistic missiles, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee first raised the possibility of a Nixon credibility gap. Senator Fulbright claimed in these hearings that the administration had tried to "pull the wool over" the Committee's eyes over the cost of an ABM system. Reporter Marvin Kalb concluded that the Committee had been "turned on by suspicions of a new credibility gap" and was "now thinking of investigating Pentagon subsidizing of universities."¹⁰⁷⁷

¹⁰⁷⁵ Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid, "Analysis (Rogers' Speech)," *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 27 March 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=202841>.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid, "Analysis (Rogers' Speech)," *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 27 March 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=202841>.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Walter Cronkite, Marvin Kalb, "Anti-Ballistic Missile / Panofsky / Symington," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 28 March 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=202847>

Television reporter Eric Sevareid was waiting on the other side of the antiballistic missile debacle to claim prescience. Sevareid said the administration's supposedly growing credibility problems were a direct result of Vietnam. He said: "On the matter of withdrawing some American troops from the Vietnam this year, the waters are...muddled." While Nixon would not commit to any withdrawals, "It was his own people who had inspired the stories about a firm decision to make some withdrawals." Sevareid believed that this might have been "a ploy to quiet public opinion and thus buy time." If this was the case, Sevareid added, "It's a dangerous game." He warned: "If public hopes are built up and later events knock them down, from such small cracks in complete candor do credibility gaps develop."¹⁰⁷⁸

As the months of the Nixon Presidency failed to produce discernible moves toward peace, Congress began to attack the President's credibility on ending the war. Republican Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont, senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, took to the floor of the Senate to demand that the administration begin the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam, saying, "We have now accomplished our purpose as far as South Vietnam is concerned." Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield and assistant Democratic leader Edward Kennedy endorsed this call, as did Republican Senators Jacob K. Javits of New York and Charles H. Percy of Illinois. John Finney of the *New York Times* suggested that this impatience was borne of the administration's "hints that secret negotiations were under way with North Vietnam" and "that the United States was contemplating a withdrawal of 50,000 or more troops" with no follow-through in actual negotiations or

¹⁰⁷⁸ Harry Reasoner, Eric Sevareid, "Analysis (Nixon News Conference)," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 18 April 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=203148>.

withdrawals. Aiken was even more explicit, saying: “The hundred days are up” and it was time for the administration to declare its intentions.¹⁰⁷⁹

It is through this formulation that troop withdrawals became inextricably linked with Presidential credibility. Troop withdrawals became the currency of credibility that President Nixon could use to purchase approval for his policies in Vietnam. Moreover, this formulation was a reflection of public impatience with the war. In March 1969, for the first time, a majority of Americans were ready to end the war. Forty-two percent of Americans who had an opinion either wanted to continue the war or step up U.S. efforts—either with or without continued negotiations. By contrast, 57 percent either wanted to leave immediately, slowly draw down forces, or negotiate a settlement without regard to the “honorable peace” Nixon had promised.¹⁰⁸⁰ However, despite the fact President Nixon had made no concrete moves in this direction, more Americans approved than disapproved of his handling of the war in Vietnam (44 percent approve, 25 percent disapprove).¹⁰⁸¹ To sustain this level of approval—and to protect his credibility with the American people on his policies in Vietnam—President Nixon would have to make good on his campaign pledge to end the war by drawing down troops in Vietnam.

While most opponents of the war had shifted the focus of their attacks to Presidential credibility, some opponents of the war did still continue to attack the use of containment to justify the war or the ideology of containment itself. In February 1969, the Senate Foreign

¹⁰⁷⁹ John W. Finney, Special to *The New York Times*, “VIETNAM PULLOUT URGED AS SENATE RESUMES DEBATE: Moratorium on Criticism of Nixon Ends-Aiken Asks 'Orderly Withdrawal',” Washington, DC, *New York Times*, May 2, 1969, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2009) with Index (1851-1993), 1.

¹⁰⁸⁰ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1969-0776: Ratings of Leaders* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 12-17 March 1969), 10-11.

¹⁰⁸¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1969-0777: Food Stamps/Anti-Ballistic Missiles Program* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 27 March-1 April 1969), 6.

Relations Committee announced the creation of a Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad. While many in the media concluded that this was an attack on the use of containment to justify the Vietnam War, Senator Fulbright made it clear in a press release that “Vietnam is excluded from the scope of the Subcommittee’s study.” Instead, the Subcommittee was an attack on the ideology of containment itself. The Subcommittee would critically examine “American political, military, and economic commitments abroad.”¹⁰⁸²

Reporter Eric Sevareid was critical of the lateness of these calls for a new foreign policy paradigm. Noting that Secretary of State Rogers told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “the administration is conducting an exhaustive reexamination of our foreign policy premises” and that the Committee had also suffered “disenchantment over American foreign policy,” Sevareid concluded, “In this endeavor both Congress and administration are Johnnies-come-very-lately well behind various private and academic foreign policy groups.”¹⁰⁸³

Perhaps President Nixon had not yet withdrawn troops because he seemed to have an extraordinarily deep reservoir of credibility from the time he took office. For instance, in part in response to North Vietnam’s shifting focus on Cambodian supply bases and in part in response to a new Communist offensive in February 1969, Nixon authorized Operation MENU, a secret bombing campaign against North Vietnamese logistics bases inside Cambodia.¹⁰⁸⁴ The *New York Times* finally broke the story on 9 May 1969. William Beecher wrote: “American B-52 bombers

¹⁰⁸² J. William Fulbright, “STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN J. W. FULBRIGHT,” press release about subcommittee formed to examine Cold War commitments, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 3 February 1969, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 1, 1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Library (Fayetteville, AR).

¹⁰⁸³ Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid, “Analysis (Rogers' Speech),” *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 27 March 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=202841>.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 544-545.

in recent weeks have raided several Viet Cong and North Vietnamese supply dumps and base camps in Cambodia for the first time.” Beecher added: “Cambodia has not made any protests.”¹⁰⁸⁵ The American media made little protest, either. The story did not even rate comment in the next issue (23 May 1969) of *Time* magazine.¹⁰⁸⁶ Nor was the *New York Times* report mentioned in any television news broadcasts in May 1969.¹⁰⁸⁷

In fact, at the end of May, before the President had made any discernible moves to end the war, approval of his handling of Vietnam was still on the rise. For the first time in his Presidency, a majority of Americans (52 percent) approved of Nixon’s handling of the war, while only 25 percent disapproved. However, Americans were also giving Nixon a clear policy prescription. When asked if “the time has come to begin to reduce month by month the number of U.S. Soldiers in Vietnam,” 70 percent of Americans who had an opinion said “yes.”¹⁰⁸⁸

Still, many in the media continued to attack the administration’s credibility on withdrawals. For instance, I.F. Stone compared the Nixon administration’s failure to begin troop withdrawals to President Johnson’s Johns Hopkins speech in April 1965. He said: “Johnson deluded many people into believing that he was moving toward peace at the very moment he was

¹⁰⁸⁵ William Beecher, “Raids in Cambodia by U.S. Unprotested,” *New York Times*, 9 May 1969, 1.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Time, “Time Magazine-Search Results,” *Time*, http://www.time.com/time/searchresults?N=0&Ntk=NoBody&Nty=1&Nr=OR%28p_record_type%3AArticle%2Cp_record_type%3Ablog%2Cp_record_type%3AOther%29&Ntt=cambodia&srchCat=Full+Archive, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Vanderbilt, “Vanderbilt Television News Archive: Search,” Vanderbilt University, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/tvn-search-advanced.pl?SID=20090425768859863>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹⁰⁸⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1969-0781: Vietnam/Supreme Court* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 22-27 May 1969), 13-14.

committing the first U.S. combat troops to the South.” Nixon was doing the same, Stone contended, by promising negotiations and withdrawals while doing neither.¹⁰⁸⁹

Supporters of the former administration’s use of containment to justify the war were frustrated that President Nixon had not reasserted these arguments himself since he took office. Conservative columnist William F. Buckley lamented:

It has been a while since we heard from Mr. Nixon his views on the justification of the American effort in Vietnam. In the past he has stoutly maintained, along with others including for instance Mr. Rockefeller, that we are there necessarily, that the alternatives to fighting there are infinitely worse by any calculation. Now does Mr. Nixon still believe that?¹⁰⁹⁰

Buckley believed it was important for him to say because, “if, for instance Mr. Nixon no longer believes in the Domino Theory...then he is presumably prepared to make concessions which he would not otherwise be prepared to make.” If, on the other hand, Buckley argued, the President still believed that containment of Communism required continuing the war, “he should tell us that too.” Buckley added, “Patience is easier to come by if we believe that the war is necessary and just.” With U.S. troops dying “at the rate of an average of 50 per day,” Buckley wrote, “That is an appalling sum to pay unless the vital interests of the Republic are at stake.” Buckley did acknowledge that President had asserted containment as a justification before the election, but concluded, “Wars require continual reaffirmation.”¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁸⁹ I.F. Stone, “Same Old Formulas, Same Tired Rhetoric,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, 2 June 1969, reprinted in *The Best of I.F. Stone* by I.F. Stone, ed. by Karl Weber (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 290.

¹⁰⁹⁰ William F. Buckley, “On The Right: Some Thoughts On Vietnam,” *Morning Record*, Meriden-Wallingford, CT, 1 April 1969, 6.

¹⁰⁹¹ William F. Buckley, “On The Right: Some Thoughts On Vietnam,” *Morning Record*, Meriden-Wallingford, CT, 1 April 1969, 6.

On 5 June 1969, before a meeting with South Vietnamese President Thieu at Midway Island—symbolizing a “turning point” in Vietnam as the Battle of Midway had been in a supposed turning point in World War II—President Nixon finally announced the withdrawal of 25,000 troops from Vietnam.¹⁰⁹² After this move, 47 percent of Americans who had an opinion signaled that they wanted the withdrawal to proceed at a faster pace while 34 percent wanted the withdrawal to continue at its present pace (despite the fact that Nixon had made no promises about further withdrawals after the first 25,000 troops departed). However, most Americans did not want a precipitous withdrawal from Vietnam. When asked if the United States “should withdraw all [its] troops from Vietnam immediately,” 68 percent opposed such a move.¹⁰⁹³

The President painted this move as a sign of the success of his strategy of Vietnamization. In *NBC Evening News* coverage on 9 June 1969 of the meeting between President Nixon and President Thieu at Midway, Nixon was shown standing next to the Thieu saying:

President Thieu informed me that the progress of the training program and the equipping program for South Vietnamese forces had been so successful that he could now recommend that the United States begin to replace U.S. combat forces with Vietnamese forces.¹⁰⁹⁴

¹⁰⁹² United Press International, “Nixon to Withdraw 25,000 Troops within Thirty Days,” United Press International, Midway Island, *Herald-Tribune*, Sarasota, FL, 1.

¹⁰⁹³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1969-0783: Vietnam/Epilepsy* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-24 June 1969), 5-6.

¹⁰⁹⁴ NBC Evening News, “Midway Meeting / Thieu / Withdrawal / Laird,” NBC, 9 June 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=446374>, accessed 23 April 2009.

Reinforcing the idea that the withdrawal was a result of the success of Vietnamization, Chet Huntley added, “On the matter of withdrawal of 25,000 American troops, Thieu said...that it should not be called withdrawal but rather replacement.”¹⁰⁹⁵

The withdrawal of troops had little immediate positive impact on approval of President Nixon’s policies in Vietnam. After the announcement, 54 percent of Americans approved of the President’s handling of Vietnam, while 30 percent disapproved. However, after the withdrawal, Americans were much less eager to continue the war. When asked what the United States should do next in Vietnam, only 20 percent of Americans who had an opinion expressed that they wanted to continue the war to an “honorable end” either by continuing or escalating the use of force. The remaining 80 percent expressed that they wanted to end the war with no mention of an “honorable peace,” with the largest percentage (40 percent) wanting to “stop fighting” and “get out as soon as we can.”¹⁰⁹⁶ Still, President Nixon’s troop withdrawals had succeeded in sustaining relatively high approval of his handling of a terribly unpopular war.

With the administration successfully neutralizing attacks on the credibility of his promise to end the war, Congressional dissenters sought new ways to attack the President’s credibility on Southeast Asia. Democratic Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri—a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—spearheaded an effort to call attention to U.S. combat operations that had been ongoing for years in Laos. On the occasion of a September 1969 *Time* magazine article claiming that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senate Armed Services Committee would take up hearings “to determine whether American armed forces were already committed to combat in Laos,” Stuart Symington took to the floor to remind his colleagues that a

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1969-0784: Vietnam/Views of Large Cities/ABM Program/Racial Integration* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-15 July 1969), 5-7.

month earlier, in August 1969, he had said on the floor, “We have been at war in Laos for years and it is time the American people knew more of the facts.” Symington said there would be hearings in the Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad that would “seek to put on the record as much detail as possible on our involvement in that country, along with the political/military agreements, understandings and commitments that have fanned the policy basis for that involvement.” Attacking the administration’s credibility, Symington concluded: “For too long we have permitted our activities abroad to be carried on behind a cloak of secrecy.” He added: “And often that secrecy veils such activities from the people in this country and their elected officials—not from the enemy.”¹⁰⁹⁷

Despite these new attacks on the administration’s credibility, the Nixon administration enjoyed a great deal more credibility than had the Johnson administration. While the days of blind faith in government were gone, a Gallup poll from mid-August 1969 showed that the majority of Americans (64 percent) believed the “federal government in Washington” could be “trusted a great deal” or “some.”¹⁰⁹⁸ Moreover, while Americans had soured on continuing the war and considered it a mistake to have sent troops, they still agreed that the containment of Communism had justified fighting the war. When asked their “feelings about the war in Vietnam” in August 1969, a majority of Americans who had an opinion (58 percent) said that it

¹⁰⁹⁷ Stuart Symington, “PLANNED SENATE HEARINGS ON LAOS,” speech delivered on the floor of the Senate, Washington, DC, 19 September 1969, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 1, 1969, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹⁰⁹⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Newsweek Poll # 1969-6988: Middle America* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19 August 1969), 34.

was either “our right to send our troops to Vietnam” or “we were justified in sending our troops to Vietnam.”¹⁰⁹⁹

On 15 September 1969, to sustain this good will, President Nixon announced that he would withdraw an additional 35,000 Soldiers from Vietnam. Nixon also recapped his “major efforts to bring an end to the war and said that “The time for meaningful negotiations has...arrived” and that he was offering a withdrawal of all U.S. and allied forces over a 12-month period in exchange for a mutual withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops.¹¹⁰⁰

Counterintuitively, however, this announcement had a negative effect on public approval of his handling of the war. Before the announcement, 54 percent of Americans approved of his policies in Vietnam, while 27 disapproved.¹¹⁰¹ After the announcement, only 53 percent approved of his handling of the war, while 31 percent disapproved.¹¹⁰² There is some evidence that this slip may have been a result of sentiments that Nixon was not withdrawing fast enough. When asked two weeks after the announcement about the pace of withdrawals, a narrow majority of Americans who had an opinion (51 percent) wanted the President to withdraw troops “faster,” while 37 percent wanted him to continue the withdrawal at the present rate. When asked if the Senate should pass “legislation to require the withdrawal of all United States troops from Vietnam by the end of next year,” nearly two thirds of Americans who had an opinion said the

¹⁰⁹⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup/Newsweek Poll # 1969-6988: Middle America* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19 August 1969), 12-13.

¹¹⁰⁰ Associated Press, “Nixon To Withdraw 35,000 U.S. Troops From Vietnam; ‘Bring An End To The War,’” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Gettysburg Times*, Gettysburg, PA, 1.

¹¹⁰¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 1969-0786: Nixon/Presidential Election* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 14-19 August 1969), 10.

¹¹⁰² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 788* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 17-22 September 1969), 6.

Senate should pass such a bill.¹¹⁰³ And, by the end of October, when asked whether they would describe themselves as a “‘Hawk’ or as a ‘Dove’” when “‘Hawks’” were defined as those who “‘want to step up our military effort in Vietnam” and “‘Doves’” were defined as those who “‘want to reduce our military effort in Vietnam,” nearly two thirds of Americans who had an opinion described themselves as “‘Doves.’”¹¹⁰⁴ Americans were ready to leave Vietnam.

The Moratorium

The antiwar movement responded to the President’s announcement of more troop withdrawals less than two weeks later with a march it called the “Moratorium.” The Moratorium, unlike previous radical protests, received significant support from establishment political figures. Still, like earlier demonstrations against the use of containment to justify the war, the Moratorium drew the ire of the press and the American public. In response to these protests, President Nixon finally gave his full-throated support to the ideology of containment in what has since become known as the “silent majority speech.” Supporters of the administration responded to this speech by staging a week of pro-war demonstrations over the Memorial Day holiday called “National Unity Week” that echoed the administration’s use of containment to justify continuing the war. The American public responded to this outpouring of support for the Cold War consensus with increased approval of the administration’s policies in Vietnam. Many radical protesters emerged from this episode even more radicalized; some even abandoned the strategy of demonstrations and embraced a new strategy of militant insurgency against the American system.

¹¹⁰³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0789: Nixon/Vietnam/Marijuana/Birth Control* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 2-7 October 1969), 5, 8.

¹¹⁰⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0792: The Future/Political Leaders* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 30 October-4 November 1969), 13.

The Moratorium was, by any measure, a massive protest against the Vietnam War. On 14 October 1969, thousands of protesters marched by candlelight the four miles from Arlington National Cemetery to the National Mall. The same night, police clashed with smaller groups that tried to march on the South Vietnamese embassy. On 15 October the nation's capital saw the largest crowd of protesters it had ever drawn; by noon, 325,000 or more demonstrators filled over 41 acres of the National Mall.¹¹⁰⁵

The Moratorium itself, unlike previous radical protests, received significant support from establishment figures. In October 1969, Congressional dissenters called for both support of the 15 October Moratorium Against the War and increased troop withdrawals. Republican Representative Paul Findley of Illinois, speaking about this resolution endorsed by 108 Members of Congress, said: "President Nixon should be supported in the determination that he himself has expressed, under which all remaining ground combat forces will be withdrawn from Vietnam at the earliest practical date."¹¹⁰⁶ In another show of support, Congressional staffers staged a 45-minute silent protest on the East Front of the Capitol.¹¹⁰⁷

Some political leaders participating in the demonstrations defended protesters against charges that they aided the enemy with their dissent.¹¹⁰⁸ Senator George McGovern appeared at a

¹¹⁰⁵ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*., 554-555.

¹¹⁰⁶ Walter Cronkite, Bruce Morton, "Vietnam Criticism / Cong.," *CBS Evening News*, 6 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200956>.

¹¹⁰⁷ Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, David Dick, Terry Drinkwater, George Foster, Murray Fromson, Phil Jones, Marvin Kalb, Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Ike Pappas, Ed Rabel, Robert Schakne, Bill Stout, "Vietnam / Moratorium / Massachusetts / New York City / Georgia / California / Kansas / Illinois / Wisconsin / Indiana / Iowa / Michigan / Washington, DC," *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 15 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200619>.

¹¹⁰⁸ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, "Vietnam / Tonkin Resolution / Protests / McGovern," *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=2521>.

demonstration at the Boston Common, which reporter Morton Dean called “the largest Vietnam peace demonstration ever seen in Massachusetts.” McGovern tried to neutralize attacks on protesters by claiming (in Dean’s words) that “the Moratorium demonstrates the highest patriotism.”¹¹⁰⁹

Some political leaders participating in the demonstrations used the opportunity to attack the President’s credibility. Speaking at Moratorium demonstrations in New York, Mayor John Lindsay said the protesters were “saying no to illusions and fantasies. They are saying yes to reality. And they are saying yes to peace.”¹¹¹⁰

Despite this establishment support, press coverage of the protests was generally negative. CBS coverage of the Moratorium showed throngs of radical youth in New York screaming “ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR! I DON’T WANNA GO TO WAR!” This only served to reinforce perceptions created by President Johnson the previous year that radical demonstrators were protesting because of cowardice—perceptions that would have been anathema to older Americans, many of whom served in World War II.¹¹¹¹ The protests were also marred by

¹¹⁰⁹ Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, David Dick, Terry Drinkwater, George Foster, Murray Fromson, Phil Jones, Marvin Kalb, Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Ike Pappas, Ed Rabel, Robert Schakne, Bill Stout, “Vietnam / Moratorium / Massachusetts / New York City / Georgia / California / Kansas / Illinois / Wisconsin / Indiana / Iowa / Michigan / Washington, DC,” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 15 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200619>.

¹¹¹⁰ Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, David Dick, Terry Drinkwater, George Foster, Murray Fromson, Phil Jones, Marvin Kalb, Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Ike Pappas, Ed Rabel, Robert Schakne, Bill Stout, “Vietnam / Moratorium / Massachusetts / New York City / Georgia / California / Kansas / Illinois / Wisconsin / Indiana / Iowa / Michigan / Washington, DC,” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 15 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200619>.

¹¹¹¹ Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, David Dick, Terry Drinkwater, George Foster, Murray Fromson, Phil Jones, Marvin Kalb, Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Ike Pappas, Ed Rabel, Robert Schakne, Bill Stout, “Vietnam / Moratorium / Massachusetts / New York City / Georgia / California / Kansas / Illinois / Wisconsin / Indiana / Iowa /

agitators who vandalized military sites such as Fort Benning, Georgia. Inside Fort Benning, CBS showed an interview with a U.S. Army captain, an instructor at the Airborne School. The captain said: "Dissent and demonstration in a democratic society, if it's constructive and positive, is a good thing." However, he added: "I don't have any sympathy with professional agitators who are violence merchants." The story then cut to scenes of Savannah, Georgia which, the reporter said, had "given up 71 of its sons in the Vietnam war." The streets were lined with American flags "in opposition to the Moratorium." In an interview, Savannah Mayor J. Curtis Lewis called the Moratorium "ill-advised and perhaps unpatriotic in many respects." When asked how the protests were unpatriotic, he added: "Our President is attempting to negotiate an honorable peace and I think it brings aid and comfort to the enemy." He added that participating in the protests was "tantamount to treason." In a separate segment, reporter Bill Stout said that Stanford students were "denounced as hippy freaks" when they tried to take "their Moratorium message aboard a morning commuter train." Another story showed a Chicago policemen confronting long-haired radical protesters saying, to the cheers of bystanders, "If you don't like the country, don't want to serve, move out of it!" The story also showed clean-cut young people in suits and business attire protesting against the Moratorium in Indianapolis and Des Moines.¹¹¹²

Michigan / Washington, DC," *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 15 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200619>.

¹¹¹² Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, David Dick, Terry Drinkwater, George Foster, Murray Fromson, Phil Jones, Marvin Kalb, Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Ike Pappas, Ed Rabel, Robert Schakne, Bill Stout, "Vietnam / Moratorium / Massachusetts / New York City / Georgia / California / Kansas / Illinois / Wisconsin / Indiana / Iowa / Michigan / Washington, DC," *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 15 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200619>.

President Nixon responded to the Moratorium on 3 November 1969 in a televised speech.¹¹¹³ The speech was a broadside against radical dissenters. He noted that protesters in San Francisco had carried signs saying, “Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home.” Nixon said he “would be untrue to [his] oath of office” if he allowed “the policy of this nation to be dictated by the minority...who attempt to impose” their views “on the nation by mounting demonstrations in the street.” He insisted that he, too, wanted to end the war, but he told these radicals that he wanted to end it in “a way which will increase the chance that their younger brothers and their sons will not have to fight in some future Vietnam someplace in the world.” Instead of bowing to this “vocal minority” he appealed to “the great silent majority” of Americans for support.¹¹¹⁴

The “silent majority” speech was not just an attack on radical demonstrators. It was also a defense of Nixon’s credibility. The President claimed:

One of the reasons for the deep divisions in this nation about Vietnam is that many Americans have lost confidence in what their government has told them about our policy. The American people cannot and should not be asked to support a policy which involves the overriding issues of war and peace unless they know the truth about that policy.¹¹¹⁵

While the previous administration had lied to Americans, Nixon claimed, he would level with them. Nixon reminded Americans that bombing had been reduced 20 percent, the South Vietnamese were taking more responsibility for their own defense, U.S. casualties were down to their lowest point in three years, enemy infiltration was down 80 percent, and most importantly “by December 15, over 60,000 men will have been withdrawn from South Vietnam—including

¹¹¹³ Langguth, *Our Vietnam*., 554-555.

¹¹¹⁴ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

¹¹¹⁵ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

20 per cent of all of our combat troops.”¹¹¹⁶ Nixon added that “the rate of withdrawal will depend on developments” in negotiations, enemy activity, and “the training program of the South Vietnamese forces.” President Nixon also used the “silent majority” speech to tie his policy of Vietnamization to a broader strategy he called the “Nixon Doctrine” of helping nations defend themselves rather than using direct military intervention.¹¹¹⁷

This speech was also perhaps Nixon’s most impassioned use yet of the ideology of containment to justify continuing the war in Vietnam. Nixon said that, when he took office, “there were some who urged I end the war at once by ordering the immediate withdrawal of all American forces.” He claimed that he was rejecting what “would have been a popular and easy course to follow,” instead, thinking “of the effect...on the next generation and the future of peace and freedom in America and the world.” Nixon insisted that the “fundamental issue” of the war was that “North Vietnam, with the logistical support of Communist China and the Soviet Union, had launched a campaign to impose a Communist government on South Vietnam.” Nixon also claimed that he was continuing his predecessors’ policies—beginning with President Eisenhower—in defending South Vietnam. Nixon cited the many statements by Kennedy and Eisenhower about the importance of South Vietnam and Southeast Asia to U.S. security. While Nixon acknowledged that many said “President Johnson’s decision to send American combat forces to South Vietnam was wrong,” and he himself was “strongly critical of the way the war has been conducted,” the question “facing us today is now that we are in the war, [what’s] the best way to end it?” Nixon claimed that a “precipitate withdrawal from Vietnam would be a

¹¹¹⁶ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

¹¹¹⁷ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace” since tens of thousands of South Vietnamese anticommunists would be slaughtered and “this first defeat in our nation’s history would result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership, not only in Asia but throughout the world” by calling into question the value of U.S. commitments to other allies. Nixon later concluded that he had only two choices in Vietnam: he could: “order an immediate, precipitate withdrawal...without regard to the effects of that action.”¹¹¹⁸ Or:

...we can persist in our search for a just peace through a negotiated settlement if possible, or through continued implementation of our plan for Vietnamization if necessary.¹¹¹⁹

Nixon concluded that his pledge for an “honorable peace” had been a pledge “to end the war in a way that we could win the peace.”¹¹²⁰

The “silent majority” speech succeeded in sating the public’s appetite for faster troop withdrawals. After the silent majority speech, nearly two thirds of Americans who had an opinion were “satisfied...with the rate at which the United States is withdrawing its troops from Vietnam,” despite the absence of any new announcements of troop withdrawals. Moreover, when asked if they supported the call by “some United States Senators” for the United States to “withdraw all our troops from Vietnam immediately,” 76 percent of Americans who had an

¹¹¹⁸ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

¹¹¹⁹ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

¹¹²⁰ Richard Nixon, “Support of Nation Sought in Search for Peace,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Spokane, WA, 4 November 1969, 10.

opinion opposed such a move.¹¹²¹ Most Americans did still want President Nixon to end the war, but after the “Silent Majority” speech, they were more willing to give him the time he needed to obtain a settlement that preserved the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia.

In the aftermath of Nixon’s “silent majority” speech, the President, the administration, and their supporters in Congress sought to further marginalize resurgent radical dissent both by attacking the dissenters themselves and by returning to the ideology of containment to justify continuing the war. They called this effort “National Unity Week,” which ran from 9 to 16 November 1969 and strategically included Memorial Day. Entertainer Bob Hope served as National Chairman of this effort and even wrote a letter to Senator J. William Fulbright, encouraging him to be the co-chairman. Hope made it clear that this was an effort to support the President, stating that the purpose of Unity Week was to urge “the silent majority” to activism.¹¹²² Senator Fulbright politely declined to participate on the grounds that it would “be interpreted by many as an endorsement of the Vietnam war.”¹¹²³

National Unity Week was both an attack on radical dissenters and a reassertion of the idea that continuing the Vietnam War was required to contain Communism. In a televised visit with wounded veterans at a government hospital in Virginia on Memorial Day as part of National Unity Week, President Nixon was greeted by a wounded major who said “I’m definitely against all this Moratorium business. These people ought to be packed up and sent to

¹¹²¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0793: Vietnam/Most Admired People* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 12-17 November 1969), 9-10.

¹¹²² Bob Hope, letter to Senator J. William Fulbright requesting his support of National Unity Week, Hollywood, CA, 6 November 1969, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹²³ J. William Fulbright, letter responding to Bob Hope’s request that Senator J. William Fulbright support National Unity Week, Washington, DC, 11 November 1969, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Vietnam.” The comment elicited a smile from the President. In a separate National Unity Week event at the Grand Ole’ Opry, Texas Republican Senator John Tower insisted, “We have a commitment in Southeast Asia.” He claimed that radical dissenters wanted the United States to “unilaterally withdraw” and “accept a camouflaged surrender.” Tower concluded that such a move would “destroy the credibility of the United States as the leader of the free world.” Retired General Omar Bradley, at a separate speech in Los Angeles, told an audience, “We must leave Vietnam only with honor.”¹¹²⁴

As with previous protests, the Moratorium—in combination with the “silent majority” speech and National Unity Week events—increased public support for the President’s policies in Vietnam. Before this episode, 58 percent of Americans had approved of the President’s handling of the Vietnam War, while 33 percent disapproved.¹¹²⁵ After the Moratorium and the “silent majority speech” (but during National Unity Week), 65 percent of Americans approved while only 25 percent disapproved of the President’s handling of the war—a shift of seven to eight percentage points in favor of the President.¹¹²⁶

However, this “bump” in public support was short lived. Immediately after the “silent majority” speech, Nixon’s approval rating jumped to 68 percent, a jump of five points from March 1969.¹¹²⁷ By December, however, that “bump” had evaporated. Nixon’s approval rating

¹¹²⁴ Bill Downs, Tom Jarriel, Keith McBee, Howard K. Smith, “Vets Day / President / Washington, DC Activities / California,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 11 November 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=2952>.

¹¹²⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0791: Vietnam War/Finances/Politics* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 17-22 October 1969), 13.

¹¹²⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0793: Vietnam/Most Admired People* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 12-17 November 1969), 5.

¹¹²⁷ Gallup, “Gallup Poll # 1969-0777: Food Stamps/Anti-Ballistic Missiles Program,” Gallup, 27 March-1 April 1969; A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War, 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 554.

at the end of 1969, 61 percent, was virtually unchanged from the beginning of the year.¹¹²⁸ Nixon and his antiwar opponents had fought each other to a stalemate.

Still, despite significant support from establishment politicians, the majority of Americans disapproved of the protests and radical protesters. After the Moratorium and the President's National Unity Week response, 65 percent of Americans who had an opinion opposed the Moratorium. The reactions of these Americans ranged from those who believed the protests were "a waste of time" to those who believed Americans should "support our men, our country, our President," to those who believed the protests were either "Communist-backed" or "encouraging the Communists" to keep fighting.¹¹²⁹ Admittedly, as bad as these reactions were, they were still less negative than reactions to the previous protests staged by radical demonstrators.

One possible reason for the increased establishment support to the Moratorium and the absence of more violent agitation during the protests was that many of the most militant radicals had abandoned demonstrations as a means to dismantle the Cold War consensus in America. Beginning with the October 1967 Mobilization and culminating in the protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August 1968, many radicals had decided that American society was beyond saving. A tiny minority, however, had decided that it could only be changed through violent revolution.

In particular, the Weatherman movement emerged from radicals in the Students for a Democratic Society who believed violent means were required to change American society. In the Weatherman manifesto, "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind

¹¹²⁸ Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 1969-0795: Vietnam," Gallup, 12-15 December 1969.

¹¹²⁹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0793: Vietnam/Most Admired People* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 12-17 November 1969), 6-9.

Blows” (the Bob Dylan lyric from which the movement took its name), the members of the movement declared that their goal was “the destruction of US imperialism and the achievement of a classless world: world communism.” They believed the mechanism for this destruction would be “the military forces of the US overextending themselves around the world and being defeated piecemeal.” In this context, “struggle within the US will be a vital part of this process, but when the revolution triumphs in the US it will have been made by the people of the whole world.”¹¹³⁰ Radical journalist Andrew Kopkind wrote that the Weatherman movement believed “opposition to US imperialism is the major international struggle today, and the ‘primary contradiction’ of capitalism.” The movement identified itself with Third World guerillas and, as Kopkind wrote, “those of the ‘internal’ black colony within the US.” In this construction, Kopkind wrote, “the role of white radicals is primarily (although importantly) supportive and extensive.”¹¹³¹

Some of this violence did mar the Moratorium. Among the about 3,000 protesters who tried to storm the South Vietnamese embassy on 14 November, were 200-300 members of the Weatherman movement.¹¹³²

¹¹³⁰ Karin Asbley, Bill Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, John Jacobs, Jeff Jones, Gerry Long, Home Machtinger, Jim Mellen, Terry Robbins, Mark Rudd and Steve Tappis, “You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows,” *New Left Notes*, 18 June 1969, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 34.

¹¹³¹ Andrew Kopkind, “The Real SDS Stands Up,” *Hard Times*, 30 June 1969, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 22.

¹¹³² Tom Hayden, “Justice In The Streets,” in *Trial* by Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Tom Hayden, 1970, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 173-174; Associated Press, “Moratorium Continues after Night of Violence,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Free Lance-Star*, Fredricksburg, VA, 15 November 1969, 1.

During this same period, the remnants of the Students for a Democratic Society organization were taken over by the Progressive Labor Party. At first, the Party was simply another faction within the SDS framework. But the Progressive Labor Party slowly moved into a leadership role, co-opted the more moderate founding principles of the SDS and replaced them with hard-line Marxist ideology, and expelled those more moderate leftists who did not agree.¹¹³³

Some in the New Left lamented this new militancy. David Horowitz tried to warn the Weatherman movement that the New Left did not just grow out of disaffection with liberalism. It also grew out of the Old Left's "old-line Marxism." He concluded: "The failure of Marxist...vanguard parties to build revolutionary movements in the advanced capitalist countries is an historic fact that no revolutionary can afford to ignore."¹¹³⁴ Carl Oglesby warned that Marxism-Leninism's "*ideology is wrong*" (emphasis is Oglesby's). This new militant wave overtaking the SDS, Oglesby added, was "much less in response to experience than to the pressure of the tradition." Oglesby lamented that his organization had "employed a grossly simplified base-and-superstructure model to explain away the fact that labor does not appear to think what we think it ought to think."¹¹³⁵

Repealing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution

In mid-1969 some in the media and members of the former Johnson administration once more began to invoke the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Congressional dissent. In response, Congress began the effort to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. From the beginning of

¹¹³³ James Weinstein, "Weatherman: A Lot Of Thunder But A Short Reign," *Socialist Revolution*, January-February 1970, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 223.

¹¹³⁴ David Horowitz, "Hand-Me-Down Marxism In The New Left," *Ramparts*, September 1969, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 60.

¹¹³⁵ Carl Oglesby, "1969," in "Notes on a Decade Ready for the Dustbin," *Liberation*, August-September 1969, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 74.

this effort, there was a great deal of confusion as to exactly what effect repeal would have on the administration. Some in Congress believed repeal would force the President to end the war while others wanted to repeal the Resolution simply as a symbolic act to reassert Congressional authority in the making of foreign policy. The Nixon administration removed all doubt as to what effect repeal would have when, in an effort to neutralize the impact of repeal as a vote against the war, the administration came out in favor of repeal. The administration was making it clear that repeal would not prevent them from continuing the war to an “honorable peace.”

The Nixon administration’s decision in 1970 to use U.S. troops to invade Cambodia to support the new government of Lon Nol accelerated the repeal effort. The Congress also passed the Cooper-Church amendment to prevent President Nixon from using military force to support forces from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam operating inside Cambodia. While the President’s move to support repeal stole some of the effect of the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the media still understood this Congressional vote as a repudiation of the war. Moreover, the entire episode—the Incursion and repeal—was a serious blow to the President’s credibility.

After the 1968 Fulbright hearings, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was robbed of its power as an insurance policy for the Johnson administration against Congressional dissent. The hearings conclusively proved that the Resolution had been obtained under false pretenses, absolving Congress of guilt for voting for it. However, after the inauguration of President Nixon, some supporters of the war began to invoke the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against Fulbright himself. For instance, after Fulbright told an audience at the National War College that the war was “immoral and disastrous,” ABC News reporter Howard K. Smith, in a commentary on the

ABC Evening News, pilloried Fulbright, reminding Americans of the Resolution that he “led to passage by a vote of 88 to two.” He even noted that the Resolution “specifically told the President to take, quote, ‘all necessary steps, including armed force’ in Vietnam.” Smith quipped, “Senator Fulbright says he’s changed his mind.” However, Smith added that that possibility was “foreseen in the Resolution” and that Congress could “void and rescind support for the war by a simple, majority vote,” but that Fulbright had failed to propose that step. Smith concluded: “There are doubtless words to describe a leader who, in a time of trial, faces responsibility by looking the other way. And, no doubt, history will find those words.”¹¹³⁶

Perhaps in response to such attacks, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee renewed its effort from 1967 to pass the National Commitments Resolution to reassert the role of the Senate in foreign policy. As the National Commitments Resolution neared passage, ABC Reporter Howard K. Smith retooled his use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to attack not just Fulbright but the entire Congress. First, he noted that the National Commitments Resolution had “a lot of anger over Vietnam pushing it.” However, he added, “It has a lot of history opposing it.” Presidents had, in emergency situations, “125 times, made major movements of forces into war-like situations without reference to Congress.” He pointed out, however, that “in 1964, President Johnson *did* consult Congress, and it passed the Tonkin Resolution which says bluntly, ‘the United States will, as the President directs, take all steps, including armed force,’ in Vietnam” (emphasis is Smith’s). Smith also noted that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution included a clause allowing the Congress to repeal it with “a simple, majority vote without Presidential veto.” Smith chided the Congress which he said “clamor[ed] for a right they already have but won’t use.” He

¹¹³⁶ Frank Reynolds, Howard K. Smith, “Commentary (Fulbright and Military),” *ABC Evening News*, 19 May 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=5271>.

added, attacking dissent, “their clamor undoubtedly encourages the Communists not to negotiate, and the casualties go on rising.”¹¹³⁷

While the Congress was engaged in trying to restrain Presidential power, members of the former Johnson administration were engaged in trying to rewrite the history of their administration. In July 1969, Clark Clifford said in an oral history that Congress had been fully supportive of the administration’s military intervention in Vietnam in 1964. He said that the Congress later tried to “prove to the public that they had been misled in the facts regarding the attack on some of our naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin and that having been misled they passed the Tonkin Resolution.” However, he added, at the time the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was passed, “the support for our involvement in Viet Nam in the Executive Branch was solid and the support in the Legislative Branch was solid.” Further, Clifford claimed: “It was rare to find a voice that counselled caution or advised that we not do it. The support for our involvement there was really overwhelming.” It was only later, Clifford added, that the Congress “backtracked” on the issue.¹¹³⁸

Clifford made a similar claim the same month in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. He noted that as “our involvement became greater...so did most public and private assessments of the correctness of our course.” He said that this approval of U.S. intervention in Vietnam was the reason “the Tonkin Gulf resolution was adopted by the Congress in 1964 by a vote of 504 to 2.”

¹¹³⁷ Frank Reynolds, Howard K. Smith, “Commentary (Vietnam Commitment),” *ABC Evening News*, 17 June 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=5750>.

¹¹³⁸ Transcript, Clark M. Clifford Oral History Interview II, 7/2/69, by Paige Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 10-11.

He even cited the language of the resolution as proving the Congress approved of the President's "use of armed force...in defense of...freedom."¹¹³⁹

Dean Rusk joined this effort to rewrite history in his own oral history in September 1969. He noted that "Paragraph II of that resolution [the Tonkin Gulf Resolution], which the historian will be able to see, of course, was not about the Gulf of Tonkin, but was about Southeast Asia." When asked by interviewer Paige E. Mulhollan about Senator Fulbright's claim that "he didn't understand it to mean what it was later said to mean,"¹¹⁴⁰ Rusk was incredulous. He said:

I recall one Senator asked Senator Fulbright whether this resolution would encompass the dispatch of large numbers of forces to South Viet Nam. Senator Fulbright said, "Yes, the resolution would cover that."¹¹⁴¹

Rusk added: "Some of them later changed their minds, and...tried to throw some cloud upon the resolution itself. But there was no doubt about it at the time the resolution was passed." Rusk added that the Resolution had "very simple language" and said that "Senator Fulbright told me at the close of Secretary McNamara's and my testimony that this was the best resolution of this sort that he had ever seen presented to the Senate." Rusk concluded: "Perhaps we made a mistake in not calling it the Fulbright Resolution."¹¹⁴²

Perhaps in response to this resurgence of use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to attack Congress and Senator Fulbright in particular, in late 1969 the effort began to repeal the Gulf of

¹¹³⁹ Clark M. Clifford, "A Viet Nam Reappraisal: The Personal History of One Man's View and How It Evolved," *Foreign Affairs*, Council on Foreign Relations, Vol. 47, No. 4 (July 1969): 601-622.

¹¹⁴⁰ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 9-11.

¹¹⁴¹ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 9-11.

¹¹⁴² Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 9-11.

Tonkin Resolution. From the beginning, a key element of the debate was doubt among many members of Congress about the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Many Senators doubted that the attacks of 4 August 1964 had taken place at all. Others doubted the Johnson administration's claim that the attacks had been unprovoked. Other Senators doubted that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution gave the President authority for the war that had been waged since its passage.¹¹⁴³

The first proposal to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was drafted in October 1969, just before the Moratorium. And from the very beginning of this effort, there was a great deal of confusion as to what effect repeal would have on the President's ability to wage the war in Vietnam. Republican Senator Jacob Javits of New York and Democratic Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island suggested that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution be repealed with an effective date at the end of 1970. ABC Reporter Bob Clark said that the repeal would "stop all combat operations at the end of next year." Clark added: "Senator Javits conceded that South Vietnam could then lose the war."¹¹⁴⁴ However, Javits said in his call for repeal:

That's the risk that we run. We have to balance that risk against staying in, being sucked in more and more, and having this war, which is so divisive of our country, so debilitating to our country, considered on the whole to be unwise for our country...go on and on forever.¹¹⁴⁵

¹¹⁴³ Beggs, *The Vietnam War Dissent...*, 250.

¹¹⁴⁴ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, "Vietnam / Tonkin Resolution / Protests / McGovern," *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=2521>.

¹¹⁴⁵ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, "Vietnam / Tonkin Resolution / Protests / McGovern," *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=2521>.

From the beginning, there was a great deal of confusion about what the Javits-Pell Resolution would actually do. David Brinkley concluded of the Resolution: “The President would no longer have any power to keep any American armed forces in Vietnam.”¹¹⁴⁶ ABC Reporter Bob Clark believed the repeal would “stop all combat operations at the end of next year.”¹¹⁴⁷ In fact, the Javits-Pell Resolution itself, in addition to repealing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, also demanded that “all American combat troops” be withdrawn “by the end of 1970.” However, the Resolution also allowed that some forces would remain until the United States had “provide[d] asylum for those in South Vietnam whose lives would be endangered by such action,” an answer to the “bloodbath” argument for continuing the war.¹¹⁴⁸

From the beginning, the media inextricably linked the effort to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Johnson administration’s dishonesty about the Gulf of Tonkin incident. For instance, NBC anchor David Brinkley, in a story about Senator Javits’ motion to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, said that, since August 1964, “many doubts have been raised about what happened in the Tonkin Gulf that night and, in fact, doubts that anything happened at

¹¹⁴⁶ NBC Evening News, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *NBC Evening News*, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=442820&Row=97>.

¹¹⁴⁷ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, “Vietnam / Tonkin Resolution / Protests / McGovern,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=2521>.

¹¹⁴⁸ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “TERMINATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION,” draft Committee report on Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 1 May 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

all.”¹¹⁴⁹ This was the heart of Senator J. William Fulbright’s argument against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution from the previous year: if the Resolution had been obtained under false pretenses, then it was invalid.

There were alternative plans for repealing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. New York Democratic Senator Charles Goodell proposed a resolution, called the “Vietnam Disengagement Act of 1969,” that demanded that all U.S. troops—not just “combat troops”—be withdrawn from South Vietnam by 1 December 1970.¹¹⁵⁰ The most moderate proposal for repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in 1969 came from Senator Young of Ohio. His resolution would simply repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution without placing any other restrictions on the administration.¹¹⁵¹ In the end, none of these Resolutions would see the floor of the Senate.

Republican Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland tried to neutralize these attacks on President Nixon’s power to continue the war by suggesting in a news conference in December 1969 that Congress repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and, at the same time, explicitly “endorse President Nixon’s plan for an accelerated gradual withdrawal of troops.” Mathias added that this would “deliberately replace the Johnson plan with the Nixon plan.” When questioned by ABC News reporter Bob Clark, Mathias added that his proposed “resolution would clearly imply that

¹¹⁴⁹ NBC Evening News, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *NBC Evening News*, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=442820&Row=97>.

¹¹⁵⁰ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “TERMINATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION,” draft Committee report on Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 1 May 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁵¹ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “TERMINATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION,” draft Committee report on Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 1 May 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

there should be no new escalation of the Vietnam war without some Congressional acquiescence in that policy.”¹¹⁵²

In his letter to fellow Congressmen about this new motion to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Mathias painted the move as an effort to “clear away the accumulated debris of cold war authorizations which were enacted as long as 15 years ago...which collectively grant the President broad and unreviewed [sic] powers to intervene militarily around the world.” These authorizations included resolutions on “Quemoy-Matsu, Lebanon, Cuba, and the Tonkin Gulf.” However, Mathias suggested that, at the same time when it would pass this repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and other resolutions, the Congress should also endorse “the President's plan for accelerated troop withdrawals from South Vietnam.”¹¹⁵³ The actual draft Resolution also suggested that the administration seek a United Nations “peacekeeping force” and that the South Vietnamese form a coalition government. Importantly, however, this Resolution set no timetable for withdrawal from Vietnam.¹¹⁵⁴ Senator Fulbright declined to co-sponsor this resolution, but he assured Mathias that his committee would consider it in hearings in 1970.¹¹⁵⁵

¹¹⁵² Bob Clark, Frank Reynolds, “Vietnam / Mathias,” *ABC Evening News*, Monday, 8 December 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=3689>.

¹¹⁵³ Charles Mathias, Jr. [US Senator], form letter to fellow senators asking for support of a resolution to repeal Tonkin Gulf and other resolutions, US Senate, Washington, DC, 1 December 1969, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁵⁴ Charles Mathias, Jr. [US Senator], draft resolution to repeal Tonkin Gulf and other resolutions, US Senate, Washington, DC, [1 December 1969], Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁵⁵ J. William Fulbright, letter expressing approval of Senator Charles Mathias, Jr.’s draft resolution to repeal Tonkin Gulf and other resolutions, US Senate, Washington, DC, 8 December 1969, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-1 General 1968-1969, Box 9, Folder 4, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

By a narrow margin, Senator Mathias seemed to be closer to the sentiments of the American public than were his colleagues who had submitted alternate repeal measures. A plurality of Americans who had an opinion (44 percent) wanted to withdraw troops “but take as many years to do this as are needed to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese,” the administration’s policy and the course supported by the Mathias Resolution. When combined with the 12 percent of Americans who still wanted to “send more troops to Vietnam and step up fighting,” it seems that a majority in the American public were prepared to give the President a freehand to achieve his “honorable peace” in Vietnam and his goal of Vietnamization of the conflict. By contrast, only 44 percent wanted to withdraw troops “immediately” or “by the end of 1970”¹¹⁵⁶ (which was the thrust of the Javits-Pell Resolution).

By the time of hearings on it, the Mathias Resolution had been expanded to also repeal the State of Emergency declared by President Truman, giving him wartime powers in peacetime which technically remained in effect. Mathias said that the intent of this retooled Resolution was not necessarily to end the Vietnam War but to reassert the power of Congress in foreign policy. Mathias explained that the “fundamental question” the Resolution addressed was, “Is the Senate, with its constitutional responsibilities in this realm, either obsolete or optional in the making of American foreign and defense policies?”¹¹⁵⁷

While the fight to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution began to take shape, the framework for debate of the war—between supporters using containment to justify the war and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—continued to play out in the media. Senator Stuart

¹¹⁵⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0795: Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 12-15 December 1969), 12.

¹¹⁵⁷ NBC Evening News “Senate Hearing / Agnew,” *NBC Evening News*, 5 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=450106&Row=91>.

Symington resumed his attacks on the administration's credibility on the issue of Laos. Noting on the floor of the Senate that recent media reports claimed "400 United States planes yesterday attacked in Laos" and that "the primary targets of these attacks were far away from the Ho Chi Minh trail," Symington said, "The secret war in Laos and our role in it are growing." Symington said the administration was concealing "American activities in Laos behind an official cloak of secrecy, while permitting unofficial leaks to the news media." He added that this behavior would lead to "problems comparable to those which developed during the past Administration," the development of a new credibility gap. Symington reminded his colleagues that Nixon himself, in his 3 November 1969 "silent majority" speech, had said that a lack of credibility in the previous administration had caused "the deep divisions in this nation" and that Americans deserved to "know the truth about that [Vietnam] policy."¹¹⁵⁸

The administration responded by using the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify continuing the war in Vietnam. In an interview in April 1970 with reporter George Watson for the *ABC Evening News*, U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker used containment to justify continuing the war. He argued that continued U.S. military intervention in Vietnam was "important in maintaining credibility of our commitments that we've made in SEATO and the United Nations to resist aggression." He added that the Communists were testing the "patience and the will of the American people." When asked if

¹¹⁵⁸ Stuart Symington, "STATEMENT BY SENATOR STUART SYMINGTON (D-MO), SENATE FLOOR, FEBRUARY 16, 1970: LAOS," Washington, DC, 16 February 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Americans indeed had the patience to fight the war, he said that “President Nixon has a very substantial majority of the people backing his policy here.”¹¹⁵⁹

In February 1970, former President Johnson returned to the fray to defend his use of containment to justify the war in Vietnam. The former President told interviewer Walter Cronkite that he had not asked Congress to declare war because he was afraid that either the Communist Chinese or the Soviets might have a secret treaty with North Vietnam that compelled them to enter the war.¹¹⁶⁰ Johnson also told Cronkite that he prosecuted the war because “Hitler’s aggression almost destroyed the world and we believe that Communist aggression will destroy it if somebody doesn’t stand up to it.”¹¹⁶¹

Johnson also, one last time, wielded the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against his nemesis, Senator Fulbright. Johnson said that this sentiment was the inspiration for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which should have been called the “Fulbright Resolution... because Senator Fulbright introduced it, with his knowledge, with his approval, with his consent. He passed it, he voted for it, 82 to [two].”¹¹⁶² It was only when the “going got rough,” Johnson added, that Fulbright disavowed the Resolution.¹¹⁶³ Johnson added:

Don’t tell me a Rhodes Scholar didn’t understand everything in that Resolution, because we said to him at the White House and every other member of that

¹¹⁵⁹ Howard K. Smith, George Watson, “Vietnam / Bunker,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 28 April 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10152>.

¹¹⁶⁰ Howard K. Smith, “LBJ / Vietnam,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=9438>.

¹¹⁶¹ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

¹¹⁶² Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

¹¹⁶³ Howard K. Smith, “LBJ / Vietnam,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=9438>.

committee, that the President of the United States is not about to commit forces and undertake actions to deter aggression in South Vietnam to prevent this Communist conspiracy, unless and until the American People, through their Congress, sign on to go in.¹¹⁶⁴

He repeated the charge later: “it never occurred to me that Senator Fulbright—this Rhodes Scholar—didn’t understand what was in that language. I called him to the White House and said this is the reason I want it.”¹¹⁶⁵ This was clearly a lie. Johnson had told members of Congress he did not intend to use the Resolution to expand the war.

In response to this attack, Fulbright lashed out at Johnson. Fulbright told CBS reporter Marvin Kalb that Johnson had failed to mention “that the basis for considering this Resolution and passing...it was utterly false.” Fulbright also claimed that Secretary McNamara “had a very good idea” that the information he was providing to the Congress about the Gulf of Tonkin incident was “untrue.” Fulbright cited the cable from Captain Herrick on 4 August 1964 that warned that Herrick was not sure the attack had occurred. Fulbright said that if that one piece of information “had been made available to the Committee at that time...I don’t believe they’d pass the resolution.” Fulbright added; “The events, as they [the administration] related them, of August 4, 1964, were not true.... It was not an unprovoked and deliberate attack. In fact...there was no attack at all.” Fulbright also told reporters: “It just never occurred to me that the President of the United States would lie to the...members of the Senate.” He added: “I was completely

¹¹⁶⁴ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

¹¹⁶⁵ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

taken in, as was the whole Senate.” Fulbright concluded that the Resolution was “justified” by “an absolute misrepresentation of the facts.”¹¹⁶⁶

Fulbright also noted that the administration had lied to him and other Senators about his intent to use the Resolution to escalate the war. Fulbright did admit that the Resolution “speaks for itself... I grant that I can read.”¹¹⁶⁷ However, he added, “He [the President] represented it, and so did his spokesmen, the secretaries, not as...an authority to widen the war and attack North Vietnam...but as a way to prevent the widening of the war.”¹¹⁶⁸ Fulbright also reminded Americans:

The President, Johnson, was running on the basis of no wider war. He made speeches against widening the war. He made speeches in which he said, “I’m not about to send American boys to Asia to do the fighting of Asian boys.”¹¹⁶⁹

Fulbright concluded: “The rationale for the Resolution was...it will be a warning to the North Vietnamese and they will no longer infiltrate—they’ll quit!”¹¹⁷⁰

In describing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, television reporters and anchors frequently—if inadvertently—supported all of the claims that the Johnson administration had once made about the Resolution. ABC’s Frank Reynolds said that the Resolution “authorized the President to take all measures to repel armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further

¹¹⁶⁶ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

¹¹⁶⁷ Howard K. Smith, “LBJ / Vietnam,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=9438>.

¹¹⁶⁸ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

¹¹⁶⁹ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

¹¹⁷⁰ Walter Cronkite, “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 6 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208581>.

aggression” and claimed that Congressional leaders later “had second thoughts about the resolution.”¹¹⁷¹ CBS’ Walter Cronkite said that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution “has served as a substitute for a declaration of war in Vietnam.”¹¹⁷² NBC’s David Brinkley said that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution “gave President Johnson power to do whatever he wanted to do in Vietnam.”¹¹⁷³ Howard K. Smith claimed that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution “became President Johnson’s mandate for escalation.”¹¹⁷⁴

Still, television reporters also supported Senator Fulbright’s claim from two years earlier that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was obtained under false pretenses, rendering it “null and void.” For instance, David Brinkley said in March 1970: “Ever since [the Gulf of Tonkin incident], there have been disputes about what actually happened, if anything did.”¹¹⁷⁵ Likewise, Chet Huntley generally referred to the Gulf of Tonkin incident as the “alleged enemy attacks.”¹¹⁷⁶

At first, the Nixon administration resisted the Congressional effort to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. However, the administration quickly realized the significance a repeal of the

¹¹⁷¹ Tom Jarriel, Frank Reynolds, “Administration / Senate / Tonkin Resolution,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 23 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10836>.

¹¹⁷² Walter Cronkite, “Vietnam / Gulf of Tonkin,” *CBS Evening News*, Tuesday, 14 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=200595>.

¹¹⁷³ NBC Evening News, “Vietnam Hearing,” *NBC Evening News*, 4 February 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=450086&Row=92>.

¹¹⁷⁴ Howard K. Smith, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 10 April 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=9897>.

¹¹⁷⁵ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution/Fulbright,” *NBC Evening News*, 13 March 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/tvn-video-view.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=450218>.

¹¹⁷⁶ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal / Reactions,” *NBC Evening News*, 24 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=20130110500030517&code=tvn&RC=451728&Row=74>.

Tonkin Gulf Resolution could have for the antiwar bloc and moved to end the debate. The administration's first move was to change its position to support of repeal. Beginning in March 1970, the administration claimed that the administration did not need the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to prosecute the war, instead citing the President's powers as commander in chief of the armed forces as his authority.¹¹⁷⁷

Fulbright, at least initially, did not seem to understand the administration's change of position. He simply called the move "most enlightened and conciliatory."¹¹⁷⁸ However, as this administration strategy continued to develop, Fulbright realized he had been outflanked. By early April 1970, he admitted that repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution would have no effect on the war in Vietnam, though he said it might restrain the administration from using military intervention in Cambodia or Laos.¹¹⁷⁹ The motion to repeal the Resolution was approved unanimously by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 10 April 1970.¹¹⁸⁰ David Brinkley said of this motion the same night, "If Congress agrees with the committee and kills the resolution, it would be more a symbolic gesture than anything else and would have no effect on

¹¹⁷⁷ NBC Evening News, "Tonkin Resolution/Fulbright," *NBC Evening News*, 13 March 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/tvn-video-view.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=450218>.

¹¹⁷⁸ Walter Cronkite, "Tonkin Gulf Resolution," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 13 March 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208686>.

¹¹⁷⁹ Howard K. Smith, "Tonkin Resolution / Repeal," *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 10 April 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=9897>.

¹¹⁸⁰ Harry Reasoner, "Senate / Tonkin Resolution," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 10 April 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=209171>.

the war.”¹¹⁸¹ The administration had settled the debate over what effect the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution would have on the President; it would have none.

The fight over repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in the Congress did have a negative effect on approval of the President’s handling of the war. In mid-January 1970, the President was still enjoying the after-effects of the Moratorium and National Unity Week, with 65 percent approval of his policies in Vietnam, compared to 24 percent disapproval.¹¹⁸² By early March, approval of President Nixon’s handling of the war had slipped to 53 percent, while 33 percent disapproved.¹¹⁸³

Some of this disapproval was probably coming from the shrinking number of Americans who wanted to intensify the war. On the occasion of General Creighton Abrams’ request to President Richard Nixon to pause troop withdrawals, perennial supporter of the war Joseph Alsop suggested that Nixon heed his advice—and used the containment of Communism to justify continued intervention in Vietnam. While the Viet Cong was being decimated, Alsop wrote, it was still “Hanoi’s asset in every province of South Vietnam.” Alsop admitted that pausing withdrawals would allow critics of the war to claim that Vietnamization was not

¹¹⁸¹ NBC Evening News, “Senate / Tonkin Resolution,” *NBC Evening News*, 10 April 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=20130110500030517&code=tvn&RC=450635&Row=82>.

¹¹⁸² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 797* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 15-20 January 1970), 8.

¹¹⁸³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 800* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 27 February-2 March 1970), 5.

working, but added that, if there was “a local disaster” because of too few American troops, this would be portrayed by critics as “final proof of Vietnamization’s failure.”¹¹⁸⁴

On 20 April 1970, despite the misgivings within the administration and in the pro-war media about the pace of withdrawals and in order, as Nixon said privately at the time, to “drop a bombshell on the gathering spring storm of antiwar protest,” the President announced the phased withdrawal of 150,000 troops over the next year. Abrams objected on grounds that it would hurt the Vietnamization program,¹¹⁸⁵ but Nixon was trying to buy credibility with the American people to successfully conclude the war. This move was also almost certainly intended to neutralize those dissenters in the Senate who had called for a withdrawal of all troops by the end of 1970 as well as to build public good will before his move a few weeks later to invade Cambodia.

Cambodian Incursion

In April 1970, in response to political upheaval in Cambodia, the President decided to use U.S. forces invade to destabilize North Vietnamese forces and assist the new government of Lon Nol. The President’s decision to invade Cambodia was initially popular with the American people. However, the move sparked a convulsive wave of radical protests against the war that left six students dead and culminated in over 100,000 protesters demonstrating on the National Mall in Washington. The Cambodian Incursion sparked an equally passionate wave of dissent in Congress. The heart of both radical and Congressional criticism was that the Cambodian Incursion was an expansion of the war, proof that the President was breaking his promise to end

¹¹⁸⁴ Joseph Alsop, “Nixon Would Be Wise to Heed Abram’s Call for Pullout Pause,” Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 1970, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁸⁵ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 287-288.

the war. In August 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin incident had given President Johnson the political impetus to gain passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, his insurance policy against Congressional dissent. In April 1970, the Cambodian Incursion would give Congress the political impetus to repeal it.

On the eve of the Cambodian Incursion, attacks on the administration's credibility were once more heating up. The President, in early March 1970, claimed that "no American stationed in Laos has ever been killed in ground combat operations." However, this was quickly followed by a statement that no more than 300 Americans had been killed, all in the air war over Laos. This, in turn was followed by the admission that 400 had been killed, 50 of them CIA or civilians. This, too, turned out to be wrong. The administration was forced to admit its error, first saying 26 but later saying fewer than 50 had been killed in "ground hostile actions." Dan Rather mused that, "despite all of this, the White House insists that the President *is* correct when he says no American ever has been killed in ground combat operations" (emphasis is Rather's). Rather added: "This is the kind of confusing, contradictory jungle of semantics reporters and the President's public relations men have been battling over on the question of Laos." Rather concluded by noting: "Reporters say that whatever misleading impressions may have been created, the President and his men have only themselves to blame."¹¹⁸⁶

In late March 1970, Senator Stuart Symington—who had been attacking the administration's credibility on Laos for nearly a year—again took to the floor of the Senate, this time to attack the administration's failure to disclose top secret testimony about U.S. involvement in Laos. He then detailed all of the stories that had appeared in the press about U.S.

¹¹⁸⁶ Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, "Nixon's Credibility / Laos + Busing," *CBS Evening News*, Tuesday, 10 March 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=208614>.

military intervention in Laos, including “an American-directed secret army” fighting throughout Southeast Asia. Symington concluded by urging “the State Department to agree to telling the American people the facts” about Laos, “a legitimate matter of public concern for the citizens of the United States.”¹¹⁸⁷

Reporter Stanley Karnow stopped short of charging outright dishonesty in the administration over Laos. Still, he wrote in March 1970, because of the rising tensions in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, “President Nixon may feel compelled to escalate the American commitment to the region despite his repeated pledges to reduce the U.S. posture in the area.”¹¹⁸⁸

Since the beginning of the tenure of General Creighton Abrams as the commander of Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, his strategy for the Vietnam War had been to interdict enemy supplies. The success of this strategy had forced North Vietnam to build massive supply bases in Cambodia, just out of reach of American ground forces.¹¹⁸⁹ As long as these bases remained intact, less than fifty miles from Saigon, U.S. troops could not fully withdraw from South Vietnam with any prospect that the country would survive after their departure.¹¹⁹⁰

Political upheaval inside Cambodia set in motion a series of events that would provide an opportunity for President Nixon to deal with this threat, but it was also an opportunity for Nixon’s opponents to attack his credibility. Cambodian Prince Sihanouk, who had long tolerated the presence of North Vietnamese forces in his country, was deposed by Minister of Defense Lon

¹¹⁸⁷ Stuart Symington, “WHY THE LONG DELAY IN RELEASING THE LAOS TESTIMONY?” speech delivered on the floor of the Senate, Washington, DC, 26 March 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁸⁸ Stanley Karnow, “Events Proving Out Thesis Of a Second Indochina War,” Hong Kong, *Washington Post*, 30 March 1970, A17, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁸⁹ Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 17-22, 267, 284-285.

¹¹⁹⁰ Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 21-24; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 290.

Nol, who demanded the removal of North Vietnamese forces from his territory within 48 hours. North Vietnam responded by marching for Phnom Penh alongside Cambodian Communists, the Khmer Rouge.¹¹⁹¹ President Nixon answered with a combined invasion of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces into Cambodia. On 28 April 1970, as the situation in Cambodia reached a boiling point, the administration finally released excerpts of top secret transcripts on Laos that Senator Symington had been demanding for months. Symington took this opportunity to escalate his attacks on the President's credibility. In a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post*, Symington attacked the administration's contention that "United States military forces can be sent by the President into combat for five years, in a country such as Laos, without a treaty or any other Congressional authorization, solely under the 'authority of the President to conduct foreign policy.'" Symington also took issue with the administration's "policy of official secrecy toward United States activity in Laos," comparing it to the administration's lack of candor about the growing war in Cambodia. Symington also implied that the administration was about to undertake a "secret expansion of the ground war."¹¹⁹² This was a perhaps unintentional foreshadowing of the events that took shape only a few days later in Cambodia.

On 26 April 1970, Nixon authorized U.S. air support to an ARVN offensive inside Cambodia. On Wednesday, 29 April, reports of the ARVN offensive hit the Associated Press wires.¹¹⁹³ Initially, television news reports led Americans to believe that the incursion into Cambodia would be solely a South Vietnamese operation. For instance, in a 30 April 1970 *NBC Evening News* broadcast, Robert Goralski reported that U.S. helicopter gunships would be

¹¹⁹¹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 288-290; Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 24-28.

¹¹⁹² Stuart Symington, letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* about administration delay in releasing transcript from Laos hearings, 28 April 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹¹⁹³ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 290; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 562, 564-565.

involved in the incursion. However, he and other television news reporters repeatedly emphasized that U.S. forces were only minor actors in the operation.¹¹⁹⁴

On the evening of 30 April, on President Nixon's order, U.S. forces invaded Cambodia at a point called the Fishhook, about 50 miles from Saigon. About 90 minutes after the operation began, Nixon went on television and told America it was, in essence, engaged in a ground war in Cambodia.¹¹⁹⁵ He assured the American people that his actions were in response to North Vietnamese aggression. He also assured the public that his objectives were limited and that U.S. troops would withdraw as soon as the Viet Cong's headquarters was destroyed and North Vietnamese troops were driven off.¹¹⁹⁶

The operation caught the North Vietnamese completely by surprise and inflicted serious losses on the North Vietnamese in terms of casualties and lost equipment and facilities. The impressive ARVN performance during the campaign also gave that organization a much-needed boost in morale.¹¹⁹⁷ In short, the Cambodian Incursion was a tactical success. But it came at a high domestic political cost.

The response of radical protesters to Nixon's Cambodian Incursion was explosive, with increasingly violent clashes erupting on American campuses and in the capital itself. The primary complaint of these protesters was that the President was expanding a war that he had promised to end. In impromptu remarks to Pentagon employees on 30 April 1970, Nixon lashed out at these protesters, contrasting the courage of America's fighting men with "these

¹¹⁹⁴ NBC Evening News, "Cambodia / Congress / White House," NBC, 30 April 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=450931>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹¹⁹⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 290; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 562, 564-565.

¹¹⁹⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 291; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 566.

¹¹⁹⁷ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 292; Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 162.

bums...blowing up the campuses.”¹¹⁹⁸ These remarks sparked more protests. At a protest at Kent State University in Ohio, National Guardsmen killed four students and wounded many more. This tragedy sparked further student protests across the nation, including a protest at Jackson State where two more students were killed. Many other universities were closed due to the protests.¹¹⁹⁹ On 8 May, Nixon held a press conference, again emphasizing the temporary nature of the incursion and assuring Americans that all U.S. forces would be out of Cambodia no later than the end of June 1970.¹²⁰⁰ Antiwar protesters answered the next day with a rally in Washington that drew as many as 100,000 people.¹²⁰¹

As with previous demonstrations, the media was dismissive of these radical protests. For a little less than two weeks, the protests dominated television news coverage, with the Kent State shooting marking the high point of that coverage. However, as unrest spilled into Washington, coverage began not only to wane, but also to become increasingly critical. For example, beginning a report on the departure of protesters from Washington, NBC anchor David Brinkley quipped, “There were so many Volkswagens getting out of Washington, it looked like a traffic jam in Berlin.” Reporter Charles Quinn then followed with a report on students who stayed behind to lobby Congress. In the report, a “Yale student” told a Congressman that “the belief that an American life is worth more than a North Vietnamese or South Vietnamese life is

¹¹⁹⁸ Associated Press, “Nixon Praises Troops, Contrasts Them With ‘Bums’ Blowing Up Campuses,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Lewiston Evening Journal*, Lewiston-Auburn, ME, 1 May 1970, 1.

¹¹⁹⁹ United Press International, “Students Protest College Slayings,” *Beaver County Times*, Beaver County, PA, 18 May 1970, 22; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 293.

¹²⁰⁰ Shaw, *Cambodian Campaign*, 153-155.

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 154.

somewhat of a distortion of priorities upon people's lives."¹²⁰² This student's assertion almost certainly clashed with the sensibilities of average Americans; in a Gallup poll conducted a few months later, when asked "why the United States has not yet been able to find an honorable way out of the Vietnam War," 26 percent of Americans said the United States still had not gone "all out [in prosecuting the war]," while nearly as many blamed the protesters for prolonging the conflict.¹²⁰³

While radical protesters may have been outraged by the move of U.S. troops into Cambodia, the Cambodian Incursion was initially popular with the American public, as reflected in overall approval of the President's handling of the war. Before the incursion, just after the news that charges had been proffered against Captain Medina over the My Lai massacre, approval of Nixon's handling of the war was at its lowest point since he took office. For the first time, less than a majority of Americans, 46 percent, approved of his policies in Vietnam, while 41 percent disapproved.¹²⁰⁴ Before the invasion of Cambodia began, the introduction of ground troops into the country was unpopular, with 59 percent of Americans polled by Gallup opposed.¹²⁰⁵ However, after the announcement of the withdrawal of 150,000 troops and the beginning of the Cambodian Incursion, 53 percent of Americans again approved of his handling of the war, while 37 percent disapproved. Moreover, fully 93 percent of Americans had heard

¹²⁰² NBC Evening News, "Washington, DC / Antiwar Lobbies," NBC, 11 May 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451067>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹²⁰³ Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 811," Gallup, 31 July-2 August 1970.

¹²⁰⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 804* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 17-19 April 1970), 5.

¹²⁰⁵ Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 806," Gallup, 29 April-3 May 1970.

about the Cambodian Incursion and 59 percent who had an opinion approved of how President Nixon was “handling the Cambodian situation.”¹²⁰⁶

Like radical demonstrators, opponents of the Vietnam War in the media focused their attacks on the President’s credibility. I.F. Stone—admittedly with a small audience—was unequivocal in claiming that the Cambodian Incursion proved President Nixon’s dishonesty. Stone wrote: “As usual the country is not being told the truth about why we went into Cambodia.” Stone noted: “Nixon pictured the attack across the border as a preemptive exercise to hit an ‘enemy building up to launch massive attacks on our forces and those of South Vietnam.’” However, citing reports from Republican Congressman Hamilton Fish of New York, Stone wrote that the administration had a different justification in private White House briefings. Fish said: “The present military thrust into Cambodia hinged largely on the reportedly surprise overthrow of Prince Sihanouk.” He added that “U.S. intelligence had known for years of those enclaves from which attacks on South Vietnam have been launched.” It was only when Sihanouk was overthrown that the administration decided to attack, to “counter any invasion...allowing NVA [North Vietnamese Army] forces to enlarge their occupied areas.”¹²⁰⁷

Congressional dissenters were also outraged by the Cambodian Incursion. In an *NBC Evening News* report the first evening of the incursion, Paul Duke reported from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

On Capitol Hill, the reaction was mainly critical. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee quickly voted to request a meeting with the President, the first such meeting since the panel sat down with Woodrow Wilson in 1919 to discuss World

¹²⁰⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 806* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 29 April-3 May 1970), 5-14.

¹²⁰⁷ I.F. Stone, “Only the Bums Can Save the Country Now,” *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, 18 May 1970, reprinted in *The Best of I.F. Stone* by I.F. Stone, ed. by Karl Weber (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 293-294.

War I peace terms. The Senators voiced deep concern over the President's authority to act alone.¹²⁰⁸

The report then cut to a number of Democratic Senators making dire predictions of an impending constitutional crisis, followed by Republican Senators predicting disaster at the mid-term elections.¹²⁰⁹

To counter this dissent, Nixon repeatedly emphasized that the incursion was temporary in nature and promised a full withdrawal by the end of June 1970.¹²¹⁰ These tactics did succeed in marginalizing dissenters. However, the results of the operation and his follow through on withdrawal from Cambodia also quieted dissent. As President Nixon noted privately at the time, "What really matters as far as the people are concerned is whether it comes out right."¹²¹¹

Repeal

After the Cambodian Incursion, the fight to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution took on a new character; for the antiwar bloc, repeal became symbolic of its effort to reassert Congressional power in advice and consent on foreign policy. At the same time Congress moved to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, it also moved to pass the Cooper-Church amendment to prevent the President from using U.S. military force to intervene on behalf of South Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. The President was able to weaken the impact of the Cooper-Church amendment by having caveats inserted into the final measure. He was also able to rob the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution of some of its symbolism by having a Congressional ally actually make the motion to repeal it. However, these dramatic reassertions of Congressional power in

¹²⁰⁸ NBC Evening News, "Nixon / Cambodia Speech / Reactions," NBC, 1 May 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451037>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹²¹⁰ Shaw, *Cambodian Campaign*, 153-155.

¹²¹¹ NBC Evening News, "Nixon / Cambodia Speech / Reactions."

foreign policymaking—the first of their kind since the beginning of the Cold War—were still seen by the media as a repudiation of the war by the Congress. The entire episode was a serious blow to the President’s credibility; the President’s opponents immediately began exacting a political penalty to the President after the passage of repeal.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee clearly saw the vote to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a reassertion of Congressional authority in foreign policy. In one of its reports, the Committee contended that:

Commitment without the consent or knowledge of Congress of at least 8,000 American soldiers to fight in Cambodia...evidences a conviction by the Executive that it is at liberty to ignore the national commitments resolution and to take over both the war and treaty powers of Congress when congressional authority in these areas becomes inconvenient.¹²¹²

In justifying the Cambodian Incursion, the Committee added, the President referred only “to his powers as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.”¹²¹³ This was not just an attack on the President’s credibility. This was an assertion by the former Congressional revolutionaries of the failed foreign policy revolution that ended in 1968 that, even if they could not move the United States beyond a foreign policy founded on the ideology of military containment of Communism, they would still try to reassert the power of Congress in advice and consent on foreign policy.

¹²¹² US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “TERMINATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION,” draft Committee report on Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 1 May 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²¹³ US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “TERMINATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION,” draft Committee report on Tonkin Gulf Resolution, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 1 May 1970, Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 17, Folder 4, 1970, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Because there was significant debate over what effect repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution would actually have on the President's power to prosecute the war in Southeast Asia, some in the Senate sought to explicitly limit the President's power to further expand the war. Republican Senator John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky and Democratic Senator Frank Church of Idaho introduced the Cooper-Church amendment, which prohibited the administration from supporting South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, forbade bombing in support of their operations in Cambodia, and made it illegal for the President to spend funds to support U.S. troops in Cambodia after the end of June 1970.

The administration's first response to this renewed effort was to work through supporters in the Senate to amend the Cooper-Church amendment to emphasize the power of the President as commander-in-chief to protect U.S. troops anywhere in the world. Fulbright told reporters in a news conference that the administration could use this altered amendment to "say to the Senate and the House in the future, well you've already given the President approval of anything he chooses to do in defense of the lives of his troops." Democratic Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, author of this change to the Cooper-Church Amendment, defended his change saying: "The President...clearly has an obligation to consult Congress before entering into any new commitment or entering any new war. And the Byrd amendment, as passed by the Senate today, does not relieve him of that obligation." He did admit that this amendment still allowed the President "to act to protect American lives when they're in great danger."¹²¹⁴ CBS reporter Bruce Morton went further, saying that the Byrd Amendment would "allow the president to send U.S. troops back into Cambodia, if he thought it would protect US forces in Vietnam or hasten their

¹²¹⁴ Bob Clark, Frank Reynolds, "Senate / Cambodia / President," *ABC Evening News* Monday, 22 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10819>.

withdrawal.” In response, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield called the Byrd Amendment “another Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.”¹²¹⁵

However, the President’s bolder move was to co-opt the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution by having Republican Senator Bob Dole of Kansas introduce a separate amendment which would repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, stealing victory from the antiwar bloc.¹²¹⁶ The administration claimed, according to Chet Huntley on the *NBC Evening News*, that the Resolution had “outlived its usefulness” and was “obsolete.”¹²¹⁷ Congressional Republican leaders echoed these sentiments. Republican Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania said in a press conference, “The Tonkin Gulf Resolution is not relevant to the foreign policy of this administration. It was deemed relevant to another administration which was in the process of escalating the war. This administration is in the process of de-escalating.” Scott spoke of the repeal like an administrative action: “I personally intend to vote for the repeal of the Tonkin Resolution. I think it’s a good time to clean the decks of a lot of these things that are coming up.”¹²¹⁸ The goal Senator J. William Fulbright had sought at least since early 1966, after his first hearings on the war, had been reduced to a matter of housekeeping. Repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was robbed of its symbolic value for opponents of the war since the move was now initiated and supported by the President.

¹²¹⁵ Walter Cronkite, Bruce Morton, “Senate / Cambodia,” *CBS Evening News*, Tuesday, 9 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=210779>.

¹²¹⁶ Bob Clark, Frank Reynolds, “Senate / Cambodia / President,” *ABC Evening News* Monday, 22 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10819>.

¹²¹⁷ *NBC Evening News*, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal,” *NBC Evening News*, 23 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=20130110500030517&code=tvn&RC=451705&Row=79>.

¹²¹⁸ Tom Jarriel, Frank Reynolds, “Administration / Senate / Tonkin Resolution,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 23 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10836>.

Fulbright was incensed at the White House's move. After the passage of the Dole amendment, Fulbright forced a second vote, on an identical motion to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This only had the effect of making the Arkansas Senator the butt of a round of jokes on the network evening news broadcasts since, as David Brinkley noted on the *NBC Evening News*, "President Nixon... keeps saying that he doesn't need the resolution and that he can carry on the war without it."¹²¹⁹

Despite having been outflanked by the administration, Senator J. William Fulbright continued to claim that the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution removed the administration's constitutional authority to prosecute the war. Dole and other Congressional supporters of the President claimed that his authority as commander-in-chief of the armed forces allowed him to continue the war. Fulbright called these assertions "very radical and unprecedented," but most media outlets agreed with the administration and its supporters.¹²²⁰ Fulbright's argument was probably severely weakened by the fact that it was at odds with the arguments that the antiwar bloc had been making in the Senate for the previous six years; Fulbright could not simultaneously disagree with former Attorney General Katzenbach's assertion that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was the "functional equivalent" of a declaration of war while claiming that repeal of that Resolution robbed the President of authority to continue the war. In fact, as if to underline this point, before repeal was passed by the House, former Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach was actually brought back to Congress to repeat his assertion that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was the "functional equivalent" of a declaration of war, implying that repeal of the

¹²¹⁹ NBC Evening News, "Tonkin Resolution / Nixon," *NBC Evening News*, 10 July 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451966>.

¹²²⁰ NBC Evening News, "Tonkin Resolution / Repeal / Reactions," *NBC Evening News*, 24 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=20130110500030517&code=tvn&RC=451728&Row=74>.

Resolution would force the President to withdraw all forces from Vietnam since he would have no legal authority to continue the war.¹²²¹ In the end, the repeal did not have this effect and the war continued.

The irony of the administration supporting repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was not lost on the media. Morton noted: “administration hardliners like John Tower voted *for* repeal. Repeal’s leading advocate, J. William Fulbright, voted *against* it” (emphasis is Morton’s). He added that Fulbright said, “Stealing a man’s bill is a little like stealing his cow.” Morton said that Dole answered: “This is national dairy month, and no one would want to steal a cow then.”¹²²² Frank Reynolds noted that “Fulbright has practically made it his life’s work to have the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution repealed” and that “he was outraged yesterday when another Senator stood up and allowed that it might be time to repeal it.” He also smirked at the notion that “both sides claim to have won a victory,” though it was not clear “how everybody can win without somebody losing.” Reynolds also noted that, while “Mr. Nixon has been very busy fighting restraints on his authority...he is enthusiastically *for* repeal of Tonkin Gulf” (emphasis is Reynolds’). Reynolds joked, “No wonder the ballparks are crowded.”¹²²³ Reporter Bob Clark said: “For Senator Fulbright and other long-time war critics, it was sort of like having the winning touchdown in the big game scored by an imposter in a borrowed uniform.”¹²²⁴

¹²²¹ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution,” NBC Evening News, 28 July 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=452320>.

¹²²² Bruce Morton, Harry Reasoner, Tony Sargent, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal,” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 24 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=210518>.

¹²²³ Frank Reynolds, “Commentary (US),” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 23 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10850>.

¹²²⁴ Bob Clark, Frank Reynolds, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal,” *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 24 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=10852>.

The Congressional effort to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—for most Members of Congress at least—had not been about ending the war. Rather, it was a move by those former revolutionaries of the failed foreign policy revolution to reassert the role of Congress in foreign policymaking. Still, the media saw the vote to repeal the Resolution as a repudiation of the war. In a report on the vote to repeal the Resolution, Charles Quinn noted: “Six years ago, the Senate voted overwhelmingly to give its authority to expand the war in South Vietnam. And now, today, six years later, it voted almost as overwhelmingly, to take that authority away.”¹²²⁵ Fulbright told a news conference: “I think it removes any constitutional authority for the continuation of the war.” He added: “It would certainly remove any authority, I think, to expand the war into China, into Thailand, or elsewhere.” Former Senator Ernest Gruening told reporter Tony Sargent: “I hope that the obvious deduction from this action is that we should get out!”¹²²⁶

While the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution itself had not been an effort to end the war, many opponents of the war used it as an opportunity to attack the President’s credibility, tying deceptions by the Johnson administration in obtaining the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to those of the Nixon administration. In the aftermath of the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, former Senator Ernest Gruening, as one of only two Members of Congress to vote against the Resolution, was interviewed by NBC reporter Cal Thomas on his reaction. Gruening used the opportunity to attack both President Johnson’s and President Nixon’s credibility. He said flatly that the Senate was “tricked into this war. They were lied into this war.” He claimed that other Senators had been “hornswoggled” and “bamboozled” and that the United States had not, as the

¹²²⁵ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal / Reactions,” *NBC Evening News*, 24 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451728>.

¹²²⁶ Bruce Morton, Harry Reasoner, Tony Sargent, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal,” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 24 June 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=210518>.

Johnson administration claimed, “been wantonly attacked and that we had to retaliate with these measures.”¹²²⁷ He added that the American public was still being lied to by Nixon. He claimed:

There is constant deception as to what’s being done and will be done. There isn’t a word of...credibility that’s been given to Mr. Nixon’s promise to end the war. It was very obvious to me, from the time he made his declaration on December Third a year and a half ago, that he was not gonna end the war but he was merely perpetuating it.¹²²⁸

Gruening also defended Senator Fulbright, saying he “deserves great credit for saying not once but repeatedly since that time that he was mistaken, that he was misled, and he was fooled.” He hoped that the Senate would “go the rest of the way and stop voting for the military appropriations to continue this obscene slaughter, this wholly needless slaughter.”¹²²⁹

In fact, both the Cambodian Incursion and the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were both serious blows to the President’s credibility. After the whole episode, ABC reporter Frank Reynolds, generally a Nixon supporter, turned on the President and began attacking his credibility. After the incursion, Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield criticized the administration’s policy of bombing in support of South Vietnamese military operations in Cambodia, claiming that this might lead to a war in Cambodia. Reynolds noted that the administration had repeatedly said it would “use American airpower to interdict enemy supply lines and prevent troop concentrations that could eventually threaten the safety of American forces in Vietnam.” While Reynolds generally agreed with this policy, he did note that “under

¹²²⁷ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal / Gruening,” *NBC Evening News*, 12 July 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451989>.

¹²²⁸ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal / Gruening,” *NBC Evening News*, 12 July 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451989>.

¹²²⁹ NBC Evening News, “Tonkin Resolution / Repeal / Gruening,” *NBC Evening News*, 12 July 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 10 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=451989>.

that kind of umbrella the argument could be made that a Viet Cong or North Vietnamese soldier anywhere on Earth represents at least a potential threat to American troops, and so becomes a legitimate target.” But his main attack was against Secretary Laird’s claim that “U.S. airstrikes are not to be carried out merely to support Cambodian troops fighting the Communists” while, “since Sunday, American correspondents have seen American planes doing exactly that.”

Reynolds noted there was “a gap if not a conflict between policy as stated in Washington and as carried out in the field.” Reynolds warned the administration: “One of the factors that contributed to opposition to the war was the suspicion that the government was not telling the whole story.” He also said that, while he disagreed, many believed “we more or less slipped into the war and one day woke up to find ourselves trapped” in Vietnam. He suggested with a smirk that the administration “say in Washington what men with good eyesight have seen us doing in Cambodia.”¹²³⁰ Senator J. William Fulbright also attacked the President’s credibility on Cambodia, noting that President Nixon did pull out troops as promised, but continued to provide air support to Cambodian troops.¹²³¹

Despite these blows to the President’s credibility, most Americans still approved of the President’s policies in Vietnam. Even after the Cambodian Incursion, the death of six students on college campuses during protests, and the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, a majority of Americans (55 percent) approved of the President’s handling of the war, while 32 percent

¹²³⁰ Frank Reynolds, “(Commentary (US, Cambodia),” *ABC Evening News*, Thursday, 06 August 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=11905>.

¹²³¹ Stephen Geer, Howard K. Smith, George Watson, “Cambodia / Fighting / Nol / United States Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 21 August 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=11697>.

disapproved.¹²³² However, a majority of Americans (53 percent) who had an opinion now either favored immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops or a withdrawal within 12 months.¹²³³ Americans were losing patience with Vietnamization of the war.

Despite this impatience, Americans believed that radical protesters were a worse problem than the war in Vietnam. When asked what they believed was “the most important problem facing this country,” 24 percent responded that “Vietnam” was the most important problem. However, 34 percent responded with problems related to radical protesters or the counterculture, including answers such as “youth protests, unrest on campus, demonstrations, [and] hippies,” “law and order,” “crime and juvenile delinquency,” or “drug problems”¹²³⁴ (while hippies, radical protesters, and members of the counterculture were distinctly different groups, mainstream Americans frequently conflated them). Moreover, when asked why the United States hadn’t ended the war yet, 29 percent of Americans who had an opinion said that the United States hadn’t “gone all out,” while nearly as many Americans (27 percent) said, “Protests have hurt our ability to deal with the Communists.”¹²³⁵

While opponents of the war resumed attacks on the administration’s credibility after the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, supporters of the war resumed the use of containment to justify continuing the Vietnam War. The Cambodian Incursion had ended, but some in the media still used the conflict there as a proof of the domino theory. In August 1970, ABC News cited

¹²³² The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 811* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 31 July-2 August 1970), 8.

¹²³³ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 811* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 31 July-2 August 1970), 9.

¹²³⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 811* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 31 July-2 August 1970), 5-8.

¹²³⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 811* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 31 July-2 August 1970), 8.

statements by new Cambodian Premier Lon Nol, in an interview with Western reporters, that “the Cambodian people [are] the aggressed people” and that that aggression was from North Vietnam. In a voiceover, reporter George Watson said that General Lon Nol “obviously believes in the domino theory of Communist expansion. If Cambodia falls, he said, the next target will be Thailand.” Watson added that Lon Nol said that “withdrawal from Vietnam should be slowed down and even delayed.” From this story, the *ABC Evening News* cut to a story about Senator J. William Fulbright blocking aid for Cambodia,¹²³⁶ implicitly painting dissenters as aiding Communists.

Howard K. Smith of ABC News also continued to echo the administration’s use of the ideology of containment to justify the war while attacking the antiwar bloc in Congress. Smith said: “Those who can, take no action to stop” the war in Vietnam. He added that it would be easy for Congress to turn off money for the war and that the Communists would probably let U.S. forces leave unmolested, as they had the French years earlier. He then asked: “Why doesn’t Congress put its vote where its mouth is, and do that?” Smith concluded: “Deep down, Congress believes the men who have sat where all bucks stop have been right.” He added: “Once that last stretch of Pacific coastline is closed by an aggressive force, the rest of South Asia, India too, might soon unravel perhaps all the way to the Middle East, as John Kennedy predicted.” Congress did not act, Smith said, because “it believes the American people would, soon after the surrender, exact political penalties” for the loss of Southeast Asia. Smith said: “In its bosom,

¹²³⁶ Stephen Geer, Howard K. Smith, George Watson, “Cambodia / Fighting / Nol / United States Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 21 August 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=11697>.

Congress believes the domino theory might prove right now, as it so terribly did when the Japanese closed that same coastal stretch in 1941.”¹²³⁷

With the media attacking the Congressional antiwar bloc, it is not surprising that the midterm Congressional elections in November 1970 gave the President some relief from Congressional dissenters on the war in Vietnam. Republican Senator Charles E. Goodell of New York—author in 1969 of the most extreme proposal for repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—was defeated by a conservative challenger with White House backing. Democratic Senator Albert Gore, Sr. of Tennessee—a vocal critic of the President in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—was defeated by a Republican challenger. While, of course, numerous other factors besides public sentiment about the war also played a role in the outcome of these elections, President Nixon clearly portrayed it as a defeat of his critics on Vietnam. In a 90-minute interview with Washington reporters after the election, President Nixon cited the defeat of these two critics as evidence that the country supported his policies in Vietnam.¹²³⁸

However, attacks on the President’s credibility only increased after the elections. After a failed raid by U.S. forces on the North Vietnamese camp at Son Te in an attempt to rescue U.S. prisoners of war, ABC reporter Edward P. Morgan said that “laughter echoed through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee room, when Defense Secretary Laird insisted to Senator Fulbright that the intelligence on the abortive effort to rescue prisoners in North Vietnam was excellent.” Morgan added: “The brave men returned downcast and empty handed because the prisoners had been moved possibly more than a month before. This reflects *excellent* intelligence?” Morgan

¹²³⁷ Howard K. Smith, “Commentary (Cong. and Vietnam),” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 11 December 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=8717>.

¹²³⁸ Associated Press, “Nixon Sees Impact On Criticism,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Reading Eagle*, Reading, PA, 19 November 1970, 28.

asked: “Can’t the President be candid with the country? Is it possible that his administration can’t level with itself?” Morgan concluded: “We seem to be back at credibility gap.”¹²³⁹

Bill Lawrence joined the attack on the President’s credibility on the Son Te raids a few days later. He began: “Credibility gulch, that wide separation between known facts and official announcements, now seems to be just as huge, just as forbidding in the Nixon administration as it was when Lyndon Johnson was President.” Lawrence warned: “The gulch ultimately claimed the LBJ presidency and its principal characters, wiping out their earlier and better accomplishments, leaving barely a trace.” Lawrence said that “Defense Secretary Laird first claimed that that [the Son Te raid] had been the only operation that took place that day north of the 19th parallel.” However, he added, “Every day, including today, we learn that it included something more including diversionary flights by carrier aircraft and intensive bombing of military and civilian targets near the camp and near Hanoi.” Lawrence added: “Fulbright, who fought LBJ as hard or harder than he does Nixon, stopped just short of calling Laird a liar. But Fulbright came so close to doing so he might just as well have gone all the way.” Lawrence concluded: “When an administration loses credibility on Vietnam, it loses credibility on all things.”¹²⁴⁰

Nixon’s Crisis of Credibility

The year 1971 brought a series of setbacks for the administration that struck at the core of the President’s credibility. In early 1971, the South Vietnamese attacked into Laos to cut North Vietnamese supply routes. They ran headlong into a force of 36,000 North Vietnamese and were

¹²³⁹ Edward P. Morgan, “Commentary (Administration),” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 27 November 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=8535>.

¹²⁴⁰ Bill Lawrence, Frank Reynolds, “Commentary (White House Credibility),” *ABC Evening News*, Monday, 30 November 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=8570>.

badly mauled, calling into question the credibility of the administration's claims about the success of Vietnamization. Soon after a verdict was returned in the My Lai massacre trial of Lieutenant Calley. While this event, in and of itself, had little impact on the administration's credibility, it reminded the public of the atrocity at My Lai just as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War launched a massive protest in Washington against what they claimed were the administration's lies about the true conduct of the war. No sooner had this crisis abated than the Pentagon Papers were released, providing the administration's opponents with an opportunity to attack the credibility of both past and present administrations. The President was forced to use his only weapon against attacks on credibility: troop withdrawals. In April 1971, in the midst of this credibility crisis, the administration was forced to announce an acceleration of troop withdrawals.

Even before these setbacks, attacks on the administration's credibility on the Vietnam War had dramatically increased in 1971. Moreover, these attacks took place in an atmosphere of daily bad news about the war. In addition to heavily covering the trials stemming from the My Lai massacre, *NBC Evening News* aired a three-part series with a number of follow-ups on drug use and deteriorating morale among soldiers in Vietnam.¹²⁴¹

Opponents of the war in the media were relentless in their attacks on the administration's credibility. In a story on 6 January 1971, David Brinkley reported that Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird had announced that the "American combat role in Vietnam would be over by next summer." However, Brinkley noted, the Secretary was contradicted later by a Pentagon statement that said, "Laird did not mean that Americans would not shoot or be shot at, that what

¹²⁴¹ Vanderbilt, "Vanderbilt Television News Archive: Search," Vanderbilt University, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/tvn-displayindex.pl?SID=20090425768859863&pagenumber=3&code=tvn>, accessed 25 April 2009.

he meant was that Americans would no longer launch any major offensives.” Brinkley concluded: “It was not clear how the Pentagon knew what Laird meant better than Laird knew what he meant.”¹²⁴²

The administration did still have supporters in the media; some defended the President’s credibility. ABC’s Howard K. Smith admitted: “President Nixon, due to events in Asia, now has acquired a credibility gap.” However, Smith added, this was to be expected since, “like Air Force One and a lease on Camp David, a credibility gap comes with the job.” He added that Johnson and Kennedy “had one too” as did Presidents Roosevelt and Wilson with respect to the Second and First World Wars. Smith dismissed the credibility gap as a result of “foreign affairs resist[ing] our control.” Smith concluded by defending Nixon’s credibility, saying, “A skeptical press is a virtue, but so is a mite of understanding.” He added: “Mr. Nixon’s central pledge is to wind down the war. And, undeniably, he’s so far done that.”¹²⁴³

Still, Americans were losing patience with Vietnamization and were hungry for withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Vietnam. When asked if “you would like to have your Congressman vote for or against” a proposal to “require the United States government to bring home all United States Troops from Vietnam before the end of this year [1971],” 77 percent of Americans who expressed an opinion wanted their Congressman to “vote for” such a proposal.¹²⁴⁴

¹²⁴² NBC Evening News, “Def. Secretary, Pentagon Statements,” NBC, 6 January 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=454060>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹²⁴³ Howard K. Smith, “Commentary (Nixon / News Embargo),” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 05 February 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=14503>.

¹²⁴⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 821* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 8-11 January 1971), 7.

President Nixon clearly sensed this impatience. In a television interview from the White House, Nixon did use the ideology of containment to defend continuing the war; he said that the United States would “bring a just peace” to Vietnam, implying that he would not withdraw regardless of conditions. Still, the President called the war “one of the nightmares we inherited” and promised “we are ending that war.” The President also promised that he would not resume full-scale bombing of North Vietnam (but did not rule out retaliatory airstrikes). However, he repeatedly reemphasized that the United States was “on the way out” of Vietnam and that the “end of...America’s combat role in Vietnam is in sight.”¹²⁴⁵

Laos and Vietnamization

In early 1971, the South Vietnamese attacked into Laos to cut North Vietnamese supply routes. They ran headlong into a force of 36,000 North Vietnamese and were badly mauled. This episode was particularly damaging to the administration’s credibility because it called into question the administration’s claims about the success of Vietnamization. This, in turn, called into question the administration’s claims from only weeks earlier that “the end is in sight” in Vietnam, since the failure of Vietnamization implied more fighting for U.S. troops. This debacle also set off a flurry of new attacks on the administration’s credibility on other issues—including a detailed *60 Minutes* story on the Gulf of Tonkin incident—and a new Congressional effort to further limit Presidential power.

Despite troop withdrawals, by 1971, Vietnamization was dramatically increasing ARVN capability. Seemingly overnight, the South Vietnamese military had become among the largest

¹²⁴⁵ Washington Post, “Nixon Says War’s End Is in Sight,” *Washington Post* Wire Service, Washington, D.C., *Palm Beach Post*, Palm Beach, FL, 5 January 1971, 1.

and best equipped in the world and, when properly led, was surprisingly capable.¹²⁴⁶ This capability was put to the test when ARVN forces invaded Laos in winter 1971. Over Abrams' objection, Nixon approved a South Vietnamese ground incursion into Laos. Two ARVN divisions crossed the border with US air support, only to be mauled by over 36,000 North Vietnamese Army regulars, supported by the newest Russian armor. After six weeks of the most savage fighting of the war, the decimated South Vietnamese divisions retreated back across the border.¹²⁴⁷

The media and the Congress almost immediately took an adversarial tone on the Laos Incursion—and focused their attacks on the administration's credibility. CBS was upset that the administration had imposed a news embargo on operations in Laos for the television media while newspapers were unaffected by the blackout. Marvin Kalb noted that Senators claimed to understand the administration's justification for the embargo (the safety of U.S. troops) but “some of them are less inclined to take the administration at its word.” Senator Mike Mansfield said: “I dislike getting my information from the Russians, the French, and the Japanese.” Even Nixon supporter Senator Byrd of West Virginia said the administration was creating an “entirely unnecessary credibility gap.” Senators were especially skeptical of the administration's claims before the incursion began that “there will be no major South Vietnamese move into Laos.” Kalb noted that, despite these denials, the South Vietnamese were conducting “probe[s]” into Laos.¹²⁴⁸

¹²⁴⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 267, 284-285.

¹²⁴⁷ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 297-298.

¹²⁴⁸ Walter Cronkite, Marvin Kalb, Bob Schieffer, “Laos Situation,” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 03 February 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=215189>.

The blow to the administration's credibility caused by the Laos Incursion was made worse because, from its outset, the Nixon administration had set high expectations for the operation. On 8 February 1971, Herbert Kaplow reported on the *NBC Evening News*: "The President said that the Laotian operation, if it goes well, will make it impossible for the enemy to conduct a major offensive in South Vietnam for at least another year."¹²⁴⁹ As the situation deteriorated, the media began to focus on the difference between the situation on the ground and the Pentagon's rhetoric. For instance, on the 24 February 1971, *NBC Evening News* reporter John Chancellor said:

The 16,000-man force of South Vietnamese on the ground in Laos remains stalled at the limit of American artillery protection but far short of its original objectives. Nevertheless, at a big Pentagon press briefing today, officials said things were not going badly.¹²⁵⁰

The news story then cut to a confrontation between Secretary of Defense Laird and a reporter. Laird said: "I believe that this operation, even if it was to terminate...now has been successful in disrupting logistics supplies." An unnamed reporter then asked: "Are you saying, in effect, that the field reports...about an operation that is bogged down 16 to 17 miles inside of Laos...are incorrect?" A stone-faced Laird replied: "No, the operation is going according to plan." The report then immediately cut to the evacuation of a South Vietnamese soldier wounded in the fight in Laos, identified only as a member of "a crack unit that crossed into Laos and was badly mauled and broken."¹²⁵¹

¹²⁴⁹ NBC Evening News, "Laos / South Vietnam Attack / United States Reaction," NBC, 8 February 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=456306>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹²⁵⁰ NBC Evening News, "Laos / South Vietnam Attack / Situation Analysis," NBC, 24 February 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=456141>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹²⁵¹ NBC Evening News, "Laos / South Vietnam Attack / Situation Analysis."

The South Vietnamese evacuation from Laos provided yet more fuel for media attacks on the administration's credibility on Vietnamization. As reporter Tom Streithorst reported that, as "The generals of the ARVN high command insist that the withdrawal is going according to plan," footage showed "panicked ARVN soldiers" hanging from the skids of departing US helicopters, "desperate" to escape the advancing North Vietnamese. As if to punctuate the point that the failure of the South Vietnamese meant more fighting for U.S. troops, the report then cut to American soldiers, fighting at the Laotian border to protect the withdrawal and blunt the North Vietnamese counterattack. The report concluded with an interview of angry and dispirited American soldiers who told the story of an American artillery unit that was forced to destroy its guns and flee the North Vietnamese advance.¹²⁵²

Democratic Presidential hopeful Senator Edmund Muskie was among the many politicians to use the failure of South Vietnamese forces in Laos to attack the administration's credibility on its policy of Vietnamization of the war. In a speech excerpted on the *CBS Evening News*, Muskie said: "The credibility of Vietnamization has been diluted and cast into doubt by the performance of the South Vietnamese forces [in Laos], which can mean nothing more than a prolongation of the war and our involvement in it."¹²⁵³

The Laos Incursion was a serious blow both to approval of the President's handling of the war in Vietnam and to the American public's patience with Vietnamization. In late February, in the midst of the incursion, 86 percent of Americans had heard about events in Laos. And they were not happy about them; for the first time in the Nixon Presidency, more Americans disapproved (45 percent) than approved (43 percent) of the President's policies in Vietnam. The

¹²⁵² NBC Evening News, "Laos / South Vietnam Attack / Situation Analysis."

¹²⁵³ Walter Cronkite, Marya McLaughlin, "Jackson / Muskie," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 26 March 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=215742>

majority of Americans (55 percent) who had an opinion believed that the setback in Laos would lengthen the war. Americans were ready to draw down the war; 72 percent of Americans who had an opinion said they were “for” a proposal “to require the U.S. government to bring home all U.S. troops from Vietnam before the end of this year [1971].” Of those who supported such a proposal, 62 percent were for withdraw “regardless of what happens there after U.S. troops leave.”¹²⁵⁴ Laos was also a severe blow to President Nixon’s credibility. In the midst of the operation, Americans were asked, “Do you think the Nixon Administration is or is not telling the public all they should know about the Vietnam war?” Over two thirds of Americans (69 percent) said they were not.¹²⁵⁵

Perhaps as a response to this crisis and the possible use of U.S. ground forces in the Laos Incursion, the Congressional antiwar bloc began an effort to limit Presidential power which would ultimately become the 1973 War Powers Act. Once again, this was not just an attack on the President’s credibility, it was another move by the former Congressional members of the failed foreign policy revolution to reassert the power of the Congress in advice and consent on foreign policymaking. The bill would only permit the President to commit U.S. forces to meet an attack on the United States or its troops abroad, protect American lives or property, or fulfill a U.S. commitment to an ally. However, the President could only continue such a military action for 30 days without Congressional approval. Eric Sevareid saw this as a direct response to the “the blank check given [to] President Johnson, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.” However, he also saw it as an effort to reassert the purpose of the founding fathers that had been “gradually eroded

¹²⁵⁴ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 824* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-22 February 1971), 6.

¹²⁵⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 824* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 19-22 February 1971), 6.

by time and events and by assertions of Presidential power.” Severeid concluded: “It has become far easier to make war than to get peace.”¹²⁵⁶ In many ways, this effort was another indication of the final break of the elite Cold War consensus among the framers of American foreign policy. While many Members of Congress continued to embrace some or all of the precepts of the ideology of military containment, most of the Senators behind this bill did not.

Just as the furor over the Laos Incursion was abating, the media revived earlier attacks against the Johnson administration’s credibility on the Gulf of Tonkin incident. In a March 1971 episode of the CBS News program *60 Minutes*, reporter Morley Safer recounted the catalogue of questions about the incident—including whether it had happened at all—as well as attacking the administration’s deception in obtaining the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This attack was significant for two reasons. First, it presaged the accusations contained in the soon-to-be-released Pentagon Papers that the war was started under false pretenses. Second, it popularized the idea that there was deception surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the initiation of the Vietnam War for those Americans who did not read newspapers or news magazines and got most of their news from television—a significant majority of Americans by 1971.¹²⁵⁷

Safer began the story by saying the Gulf of Tonkin incident had “become as controversial as the war itself.” His central question was: “The U.S. destroyers *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were attacked by Communist torpedo boats. Or, were they?”¹²⁵⁸ Safer concluded that the first attack,

¹²⁵⁶ Walter Cronkite, Eric Severeid, “Analysis (US Forces Commitment),” *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 11 February 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=214831>

¹²⁵⁷ Kevin Williams, “Vietnam: The First Living Room War,” in *The Fog of War: The Media on the Battlefield* by Derrik Mercer, Geoff Mungham, Kevin Williams, and Sir Tom Hopkinson, (London: Heinemann, 1987), 213-260.

¹²⁵⁸ Joseph Wershba, “What *Really* Happened at Tonkin Gulf?” *60 Minutes*, 16 March 1971, Museum of Broadcast Communications Archive, <http://archives.museum.tv/archives>.

on 2 August 1964, had definitely happened. However, Safer was unforgiving on questions about the second attack on 4 August 1964. He said: “Senate investigators now believe there never was any battle that night.” Safer highlighted nearly every discrepancy identified during the 1968 Fulbright hearings. Safer included an interview with main gun director Patrick Park, now a civilian. Safer asked: “Do you think, that night, August 4th, in the pitch black, in a heavy swell, rainstorms, was there anything to shoot at out there.” Park responded: “No, I don’t...I’m certain that there was not anything to shoot at.” Safer interspersed clips of his cross-examination of Captain Herrick with interviews from other crew members who contradicted his account of the incident.¹²⁵⁹

Safer also focused on the provocative nature of the patrols, including the mysterious “black box” that Safer said Secretary McNamara had testified was used to “*stimulate* North Vietnamese and Communist Chinese radar” (emphasis is Safer’s). Safer then immediately cut to former Senator Wayne Morse who said, “The *Maddox* was a spy ship.” Safer also called into question the location of the DESOTO patrols. He showed Morse saying that the *Maddox* “went into the national waters of North Vietnam.” Morse concluded: “We weren’t looking for a peaceful out, for we intended to make war.” Safer also highlighted the OPLAN 34A raids that McNamara had “left out or didn’t know or touched on too lightly” during hearings on 6 August 1964. Safer highlighted that McNamara had testified there was no connection between the DESOTO patrols and the OPLAN 34A raids, even though cables from the Navy at the time contradicted this claim.¹²⁶⁰

¹²⁵⁹ Joseph Wershba, “What *Really* Happened at Tonkin Gulf?” *60 Minutes*, 16 March 1971, Museum of Broadcast Communications Archive, <http://archives.museum.tv/archives>.

¹²⁶⁰ Joseph Wershba, “What *Really* Happened at Tonkin Gulf?” *60 Minutes*, 16 March 1971, Museum of Broadcast Communications Archive, <http://archives.museum.tv/archives>.

Morley Safer sympathetically portrayed Senator Fulbright for his role in the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Safer did say that Fulbright was “President Johnson’s principal ally in steering the Tonkin Gulf Resolution through the Senate.” However, he added, Fulbright “spent many of the next six years trying to repeal the resolution.” In the story, Fulbright was quoted: “I personally am convinced in my own mind that no attack took place on the Fourth.” Safer added, over a voiceover of McNamara’s briefing to reporters in August 1964: “But on the night of August 4, 1964, hardly anyone doubted Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s official version.” Safer said that McNamara’s version of the attack was that the ships “had been illegally and deliberately attacked while on normal, routine patrol somewhere near the middle of Tonkin Gulf.” However, Safer added, “Senator Fulbright disagrees.” Safer showed Fulbright claiming that if he had been given the infamous telegram from Captain Herrick about his doubts over the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution would have never been passed. Safer then showed and read the text of Herrick’s message, which concluded: “Suggest complete evaluation before any further action.”¹²⁶¹

Safer also accused Johnson of misleading the Congress as to what he would do with the Resolution.¹²⁶² After showing the President explaining to Walter Cronkite the previous year that he had not sought a declaration of war because he feared that the Soviet Union or Communist China had a secret treaty with North Vietnam, Safer cut to Fulbright saying: “He used to say in

¹²⁶¹ Joseph Wershba, “What *Really* Happened at Tonkin Gulf?” *60 Minutes*, 16 March 1971, Museum of Broadcast Communications Archive, <http://archives.museum.tv/archives>.

¹²⁶² *60 Minutes*, “TONKIN GULF/60 MINUTES/CBS TV/3-16-71,” *60 Minutes*, CBS, transcript, 16 March 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 21, Fulbright, *60 Minutes*, CBS TV, Tonkin Gulf, March 16, 1971, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

his speeches, ‘I’m not about to send American boys to Asia to fight the battles that Asian boys should fight,’ and similar statements.”¹²⁶³

Safer also claimed that the U.S. military had been deceptive. He said that the U.S. Navy interviewed all of the participants on the two destroyers but that “testimony only of those who thought they had seen enemy action was later presented to the Fulbright Committee.” Wayne Morse concluded, grinning, “If you rely upon the American military for credibility then you’re easy prey.”¹²⁶⁴

Safer concluded that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was a pretext for action the administration wanted to take anyway. Safer asked former Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wonkey, “Were we waiting for an incident at the time?”¹²⁶⁵ Wonkey responded:

...Probably we were on the alert for the kind of provocation that would lead us to react, yes. And the Tonkin Gulf incident just provided the trigger for an American response that would have occurred in any event at some point in history.¹²⁶⁶

¹²⁶³ Joseph Wershba, “What *Really* Happened at Tonkin Gulf?” *60 Minutes*, 16 March 1971, Museum of Broadcast Communications Archive, <http://archives.museum.tv/archives>.

¹²⁶⁴ Joseph Wershba, “What *Really* Happened at Tonkin Gulf?” *60 Minutes*, 16 March 1971, Museum of Broadcast Communications Archive, <http://archives.museum.tv/archives>.

¹²⁶⁵ *60 Minutes*, “TONKIN GULF/60 MINUTES/CBS TV/3-16-71,” *60 Minutes*, CBS, transcript, 16 March 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 21, Fulbright, *60 Minutes*, CBS TV, Tonkin Gulf, March 16, 1971, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²⁶⁶ *60 Minutes*, “TONKIN GULF/60 MINUTES/CBS TV/3-16-71,” *60 Minutes*, CBS, transcript, 16 March 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 21, Fulbright, *60 Minutes*, CBS TV, Tonkin Gulf, March 16, 1971, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Safer noted that Congress had finally repealed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. He added: “Senator Fulbright's argument was the resolution, like any other contract based on misrepresentation, was null and void.”¹²⁶⁷

My Lai and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Just as the disastrous Laos Incursion began to fade from the headlines, a verdict was returned in the My Lai massacre trial of Lieutenant William Calley. While this event, in and of itself, had little impact on the administration’s credibility, it reminded the public of the atrocity at My Lai just as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War launched a massive protest in Washington. While the VVAW did attack the administration’s use of containment to justify continuing the war and did defend radical protesters, the heart of the VVAW’s critique of the war—as explained by VVAW leader (and future Senator, Presidential candidate, and Secretary of State) John Kerry in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the demonstrations—was that the United States was engaged in war crimes in the Vietnam and that the administration was lying to the American people about this fact. The media took these and other veteran protesters much more seriously than they ever had radical protesters, forcing the administration to respond both with troop withdrawals and veteran supporters of its own.

As he had responded to other threats to his credibility, President Nixon responded to the protests by the VVAW with the announcement of troop withdrawals. While this announcement failed to restore Nixon’s credibility with the American people to its highs from before the Laos Incursion, the announcement did prevent a further erosion of his credibility after the VVAW protests.

¹²⁶⁷ 60 Minutes, “TONKIN GULF/60 MINUTES/CBS TV/3-16-71,” *60 Minutes*, CBS, transcript, 16 March 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 21, Fulbright, 60 Minutes, CBS TV, Tonkin Gulf, March 16, 1971, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

The American public first heard reports of the massacre at My Lai in late 1969. Stories of the incident captivated the public, with 95 percent of Americans saying they had heard about the incident in December 1969. However, from the very beginning, most Americans were understanding of the perpetrators, with 65 percent of Americans who had an opinion believing that “soldiers who took part in the shooting” should not “be punished.”¹²⁶⁸ On 29 March 1971, in the aftermath of the disastrous Laos Incursion, a verdict was handed down for Lieutenant William Calley in the long, highly publicized trial over the My Lai massacre. Public uproar erupted over the verdict and the severity of the sentence, and Nixon, after a review, reduced the sentence of life at hard labor to 20 years in prison (of which Calley eventually only served three and a half years). Nixon also ordered Calley released pending his appeal.¹²⁶⁹

This episode had little impact on the President’s credibility, in and of itself. However, at the same time, the final chapter of the My Lai tragedy was being written, a new threat to the administration’s policies in Vietnam was taking shape. In January, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) conducted their “winter soldier” U.S. war crimes investigation at a Howard Johnson’s Motor Lodge in Detroit.¹²⁷⁰ This event was all the more dramatic because it echoed perceptions of the war already created by reports of the My Lai massacre. However, both the My Lai incident and the “winter soldier” investigation would provide ammunition for the VVAW’s true purpose—to attack the administration’s credibility on its portrayal of the war. The VVAW’s contention was that the United States was committing war crimes in Vietnam and that

¹²⁶⁸ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 0795: Vietnam* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 12-15 December 1969), 5-11.

¹²⁶⁹ *New York Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971); Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 299-300.

¹²⁷⁰ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 298.

the administration was hiding this fact from the American people—lying by omission of important facts the VVAW contended Americans had the right to know.

In April, the group marched on Washington and, in a highly publicized event, threw their medals over a fence at the Capitol. On 22 April, VVAW member and future U.S. Senator and Secretary of State John Kerry testified before the Fulbright Committee famously asking, “How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?” The event culminated on 24 April with between 200,000 and 500,000 protesters gathering in Washington, and another 150,000 gathering in San Francisco. Some protesters stayed for a week, camping on the National Mall, before being dispersed by Capitol police.¹²⁷¹ While only a fraction of the protesters were veterans, the former service members drew the vast majority of media attention.

The VVAW protests in Washington did draw extensive media coverage. And this coverage repeatedly emphasized both the VVAW’s charges of U.S. war crimes and its attacks on administration credibility. In one *NBC Evening News* report, a protesting veteran, Robert Bilger, displayed two ears he claimed were from dead North Vietnamese soldiers and told a reporter, “I cut ears off, yes...It was a policy. That was body count...You didn’t bring in a dead body from the field, you brought in a right ear.”¹²⁷² These were facts about the war that most Americans had never heard—especially on the evening news. The impression the VVAW was trying to make with such claims was that Americans were not getting the whole truth about Vietnam, an argument the group would repeatedly make during its protests in Washington.

Another element of the VVAW strategy was to portray itself as more credible on the war than the Nixon administration. The television news media definitely took these protesters more

¹²⁷¹ Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 298.

¹²⁷² NBC Evening News, “Washington, DC / Antiwar Demonstrations,” NBC, 18 April 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=457147>, accessed 25 April 2009.

seriously than they ever had radical protesters in previous protests. At the end of journalist Ron Nessen's report on the demonstrations, he said: "At least these antiwar demonstrators have been to Vietnam and know firsthand what they are demonstrating against."¹²⁷³ Other veteran protesters played to this perception. CBS reporter Bruce Morton interviewed members of the "Concerned Officers' Movement" that included active duty officers protesting the war. These officers clearly understood their own appeal to what they called "Middle America." Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade Robert Brown said that most Americans "have just been completely turned off by a lot of radical talk and rhetoric and we felt that the most effective [way] to effect change was to be responsible." Morton concluded by noting that Brown was "discharged last week, two years ahead of schedule," presumably because of his dissent.¹²⁷⁴

In one report, David Brinkley stoically explained that a group of veterans was arrested for demonstrating at the Supreme Court. "Among them were two veterans who lost both their legs in the war and were in wheelchairs. They demanded to be arrested too. The police refused." Brinkley's report featured none of his former dismissive sarcasm about protesters. Footage then cut, in rapid succession, to hundreds of veterans chanting and singing on the steps of the Supreme Court, hundreds of police marching toward them with clubs, and the veterans being marched away with their hands cuffed behind their heads. The story cut again, this time to "one of [the VVAW's] leaders, John Kerry, a former Navy gunboat commander, wounded three times in Vietnam," testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kerry told the

¹²⁷³ NBC Evening News, "Washington, DC / Antiwar Demonstrations," NBC, 18 April 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=457147>, accessed 25 April 2009.

¹²⁷⁴ Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Tony Sargent, "Washington, DC / Anti-War Protests," *CBS Evening News*, Sunday, 18 April 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=216190>.

committee that every day “someone has to die so that President Nixon won’t be...the first President to lose a war.”¹²⁷⁵

John Kerry was a central figure in the VVAW protests. And his main argument was that he and his fellow veterans were more credible than the administration or the President on the Vietnam War. In an interview on the *CBS Evening News*, he claimed veterans could provide “the truth about this war more than any other group in this country.” He added: “Men who fought the war...know what it’s like...know what we’re fighting...know what they’ve been made to do.” Kerry concluded: “We can tell people with more credibility the dangers of our present course than anybody else.”¹²⁷⁶

Likewise, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had intended Kerry’s testimony to be an attack on the administration’s credibility. Fulbright made it clear in the opening of hearing with John Kerry that he was asking this Vietnam veteran to testify because the administration could not be believed on the war. He said, “As you know, there has grown up in this town a feeling that it is extremely difficult to get accurate information about the war and I don’t know a better source than you and your associates.”¹²⁷⁷

Likewise, Kerry understood the power of the recent My Lai massacre trial verdict over the public imagination and reminded Americans of that incident during his testimony. In the hearings, John Kerry purported to tell America the facts of “what this country, in a sense, made

¹²⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁶ Bruce Morton, Roger Mudd, Tony Sargent, “Washington, DC / Anti-War Protests,” *CBS Evening News*, Sunday, 18 April 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=216190>.

¹²⁷⁷ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

them [veterans] do” in Vietnam. They had been compelled to commit “crimes” in Vietnam and believed that “the crimes which we are committing” in Vietnam threatened the country more than Communist expansion. Kerry indicted the administration which “rationalized destroying villages in order to save them” and the American people who had lost their “sense of morality as [they] accepted very coolly a My Lai.” Kerry claimed that the United States was violating the Geneva Conventions, which it claimed to embrace, with its “use of free fire zones, harassment interdiction fire, search and destroy missions, the bombings, the torture of prisoners, the killing of prisoners, accepted policy by many units in South Vietnam.”¹²⁷⁸

Kerry also directly attacked the administration for lying about Vietnam. Kerry railed against the administration for claiming that “no ground troops are in Laos, so it is all right to kill Laotians by remote control.” Instead, Kerry said, “There is absolutely no difference between ground troops and a helicopter, and yet people have accepted a differentiation fed them by the administration.” He added: “believe me the helicopter crews fill the same body bags and they wreak the same kind of damage on the Vietnamese and Laotian countryside as anybody else.”¹²⁷⁹ Kerry decried the administration’s “falsification of body counts, in fact the glorification of body counts” and its repeated claims that “the back of the enemy was about to break.” When directly questioned by Senator Symington as to whether it was “possible for the President or Congress to get accurate and undistorted information through official military channels,” Kerry claimed that

¹²⁷⁸ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

¹²⁷⁹ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

reports he himself had sent to his superiors were later reported in *Stars and Stripes*, and “the very mission we had been on had been doubled in figures and tripled in figures.”¹²⁸⁰

John Kerry’s defense of demonstrators in radical protests was probably less well received by the American public. Kerry railed against Vice President Agnew’s claim in 1970 that the media “glamorize[d] the criminal misfits of society while our best men die in Asian rice paddies to preserve the freedom which most of those misfits abuse.” Kerry said that it was “those he calls misfits [who] were standing up for us in a way that nobody else in this country dared to.” Likewise Kerry believed that veterans could not “consider ourselves America’s best men when we are ashamed of and hated what we were called on to do in Southeast Asia.”¹²⁸¹

John Kerry did also attack the administration’s use of containment to justify the war, and in so doing probably alienated the majority of Americans who still embraced the Cold War consensus. He argued that the Vietnam War was “a civil war, an effort by a people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever.” He also said that most Vietnamese “didn’t even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart.” Kerry and his associates rejected the very premise that Southeast Asia was vital to the “preservation of freedom” and called such assertions “criminal hypocrisy.” He insisted America could not “fight communism all over the world” and could not “right every wrong.” Kerry believed that the United States was still behaving as if it

¹²⁸⁰ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

¹²⁸¹ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

was opposed by a “Communist monolith” and using “cold war precepts which are no longer applicable.”¹²⁸²

These comments did succeed in eliciting similar comments from the members of the Committee. Senator Claiborne Pell said: “This war was really just as wrong, immoral, and unrelated to our national interests 5 years ago as it is today.” Senator Fulbright lamented that the United States’ policy of military containment since the Second World War had cost \$1.5 trillion, robbing the Congress of the ability to deal with many pressing social problems. The Cold War, he added, had also “eroded the role of the Congress” in foreign policy.¹²⁸³

President Nixon had clearly understood the impact the demonstrations would have even before they occurred. Presumably to blunt the effect of the VVAW protest, Nixon used the only weapon he had in his arsenal to protect his credibility: troop withdrawals. The President announced on 7 April 1971 that he was accelerating the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam; he would withdraw an additional 100,000 troops between 1 May and 1 December 1971.¹²⁸⁴

This preemptive strike against the VVAW protests appears to have at least prevented the American public’s opinion of the President’s credibility from slipping further. Immediately following the April protests and testimony by John Kerry before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a Gallup poll showed that trust in President Nixon’s credibility was virtually unchanged from February. When asked if the administration was “telling the public all they

¹²⁸² US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

¹²⁸³ US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, From the Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) (Washington, DC: US Senate, 22 April 1971), 179-210.

¹²⁸⁴ Associated Press, “Nixon Plans Slight Boost in 1971 Troop Cut in Vietnam,” Associated Press, Washington, D.C., *Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, WA, 1.

should know about the Vietnam war,” two thirds of Americans still said it was not.¹²⁸⁵ Moreover, there was some evidence that Americans’ faith in the ideology of containment as a justification for the war in Vietnam was shaken. Americans were asked if they agreed with President Nixon’s contention “that if we leave South Vietnam in a position to defend herself that we will have peace in the next generation,” 82 percent of Americans who had an opinion disagreed.¹²⁸⁶ However, there is also evidence that the protests had otherwise helped the President. In the aftermath of the Laos Incursion, the verdict in the Calley trial, and the protests, more Americans (50 percent) once more approved of the President’s handling of the war than disapproved (39 percent).¹²⁸⁷ This was a rebound of more than seven percentage points from March, when more people had disapproved than approved of Nixon’s policies in Vietnam.

The Pentagon Papers

Just as this furor was abating, the *New York Times* announced in June 1971 that it would publish the *Pentagon Papers*, a collection of secret documents leaked to the paper by former Rand Corporation analyst, Daniel Ellsberg. Despite the fact that the papers only implicated the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in possible deception, President Nixon took the extraordinary step of filing an injunction to prevent publication. The publication went forward only after the injunction was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.¹²⁸⁸

¹²⁸⁵ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 828* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 23-26 April 1971), 5-7.

¹²⁸⁶ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 828* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 23-26 April 1971), 15-21.

¹²⁸⁷ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 828* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 23-26 April 1971), 7.

¹²⁸⁸ *New York Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971); Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 299-300.

While these papers were primarily a threat to the credibility of the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations, the papers still had an impact on the Nixon administration and its credibility. First, the papers reinforced the impression—first created by the revelations of the administration’s deception in getting the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—that the war was somehow illegitimate because it was initiated under false pretenses. Second, publicity, news stories, and interviews surrounding the release of the Papers afforded opponents of the war numerous opportunities to attack the credibility not just of previous administrations, but also of the Nixon administration.

In the weeks after the release of the Pentagon Papers, some reporters dismissed the importance of their revelations. For instance, Howard K. Smith, in a commentary on the *ABC Evening News*, claimed that there was little new in the Pentagon Papers. Smith said revelations that “the bombing of North Vietnam was planned months before it took place, and before the 1964 elections, was reported in [a] book by Charles Roberts.” Smith added: “The revelation that the Tonkin Resolution was prepared as a contingency long before there was a Tonkin incident to justify putting it before Congress is not new either.” Smith claimed that “Mr. William Bundy of the State Department, who worked on the draft, made that public, several years ago, while still in the State Department.”¹²⁸⁹ (In fact, J. William Fulbright had made that public with the reluctant acquiescence of Bundy, just before Fulbright’s 1968 hearings.)

Many in the media focused on the revelations in the Papers about the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to reinforce the public perception that the war was illegitimate as it had been initiated under false pretenses. CBS News aired a special on the

¹²⁸⁹ Howard K. Smith, “Commentary (Classified Pentagon Rpt’.),” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 15 June 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=15901>.

Pentagon Papers which featured an extensive segment on the revelations in the Papers about the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In the introduction to this segment, Bernard Kalb noted that the President was in a Presidential campaign claiming he “would not send American boys to fight Asian boys’ wars” while the “the United States was stage managing South Vietnamese commando raids against the North, patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin with destroyers, flying U2s over North Vietnam. Altogether...named operation 34A.” While this report did not question whether the 4 August 1964 attack against U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin occurred, it did note that this “elaborate program of covert military operations against North Vietnam” was referred to by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as “a provocation strategy.” This story also noted: “Congress passed a resolution prepared months before by a high State Department official authorizing the President to take whatever military action [was] required to repel community aggression.”¹²⁹⁰

This segment also featured a panel discussion with reporter Bernard Kalb, Senator J. William Fulbright, and Walt Rostow. In this segment, both Kalb and Fulbright reinforced the idea that the war was somehow illegitimate because it had been initiated under false pretenses. Senator Fulbright claimed that he had supported the Tonkin Gulf Resolution because he had then “accepted the story given to us by the President and Mr. [McNamara] and Mr. Rusk. I believed General Wheeler.” He added that these operations were kept secret and despite “three different hearings about this matter they concealed this and, in fact, I think the record will show they misrepresented these preliminary activities which you referred to.” Fulbright added: “I thought

¹²⁹⁰ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Barry Goldwater was the man who represented that policy and the President was genuinely interested in preventing a war.” He also said: “The resolution was presented to us as a resolution to prevent a war.... If you do this...the North Vietnamese would see the futility of pursuing this matter and there would not be any wider war.” Rostow disputed that the President had hidden his provocations from Americans. He claimed that the President had told Americans and the Congress that “he was not going to give up on the treaty commitment.” He did admit that the President had said that he “was not going to use American power carelessly” but refused to concede that President Johnson had promised before his election that he would not deploy troops to Vietnam.¹²⁹¹

Rostow also counterattacked on the matter of the pre-written Tonkin Gulf Resolution. He said that the President “did take the Senate fully into his confidence.”¹²⁹² To prove this, he noted the exchange on the Senate floor between Senator Cooper and Fulbright about possible uses of the Resolution:

Senator Cooper said to you [Fulbright] on the floor, sir, in Sixth of August—“Then looking ahead if the President decided that it was necessary to use such force as could lead into war, we will give that authority by this resolution?” To which Senator Fulbright replied, “That is the way I would interpret it.”¹²⁹³

¹²⁹¹ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²⁹² CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²⁹³ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12.

Fulbright responded: “We were not told the truth about even the incident on the Fourth of August. I doubt it occurred at all.”¹²⁹⁴

This same special report also tied the Pentagon Papers to other forms of Presidential deception by both Presidents Johnson and Nixon. Bernard Kalb set the tone for this discussion: “The war in Vietnam has often been camouflaged by misleading statistics of body counts, weapons captured, hamlets pacified.” Kalb did accept that Johnson and his predecessors were genuine in their repeated declarations that the Vietnam War was required to contain Communism. Yet he still claimed: “The Pentagon Papers have touched off the deepest controversies centering on whether the Presidents and their men deceived the people.”¹²⁹⁵

This segment included a panel discussion with Republican Senator John Tower of Texas, Senator J. William Fulbright, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., former National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, Max Frankel of the *New York Times*, and Crosby Noyes of the *Washington Evening Star*. During most of this panel discussion, opponents of the war attacked not only President Johnson’s but also President Nixon’s credibility. Fulbright claimed that not only had Presidents Johnson and Nixon ignored Congress, they had lied to Congress as well:

The lack of candor, the withholding of knowledge of events, the absence of any genuine consultation with elected representatives of the people is compelling

Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²⁹⁴ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²⁹⁵ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

evidence of an attitude on the part of the small coterie of decision makers which is anti-democratic and contrary to the fundamental principles of our constitution.¹²⁹⁶

When Arthur Schlesinger made the point that Kennedy used to say, “in the final analysis, it is their [the South Vietnamese] war...they are the ones who have to win it or lose it,” Fulbright retorted, “Johnson said exactly the same thing, too.” Fulbright said that Johnson never chose to “consult [Congress] in the sense of telling them the truth and seeking their...advice. There was a complete contempt for the Congress.” Instead, he added, “there was only an effort to manipulate and deceive them.... I don't think Congress was ever told the truth in any sense.” Rostow tried to corner the Senator: “Senator, isn't...it true that until 1965 at least that you were in complete agreement with our policies and the assumptions on which they were based?” Fulbright quipped: “Well, until I discovered what they *were*” (emphasis is Fulbright's).¹²⁹⁷

Arthur Schlesinger attacked both the use of containment to justify the war and the President's deception. He said that the Pentagon Papers “accentuate the basic mystery that is why anyone ever supported that Vietnam so involved the American national interest or so threatened the security of the United States.” He added: “There is far too much deception here, but there is also a terrifying amount of self-deception.” He concluded: “the great lesson...to be

¹²⁹⁶ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹²⁹⁷ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

draw from this [the Papers] is don't trust your leaders until they earn and justify that trust by telling the truth to the people.”¹²⁹⁸

Walt Rostow tried to use the panel discussion to reassert the Johnson administration's use of containment to justify the war. In response to Fulbright's claim that there was a secret commitment to South Vietnam that was not made public in the Eisenhower administration, Rostow said: “The critical thing that happened in that period was the SEATO treaty.” Rostow described this commitment: “The President of the United States quite openly decided that the protection of that area from takeover, the maintenance of its independence against communism was in the highest national interest.” Rostow also noted that Senators Mansfield and Humphrey had supported this commitment. John Tower echoed these sentiments. Even moderator Bernard Kalb acknowledged that the Kennedy administration “recognize[d] that commitment. They agree[d] to a boost in the advisors; they approve[d] of covert actions against North Vietnam.” Even erstwhile critic of the war Arthur Schlesinger was forced to admit that “President Kennedy repeatedly in public statements expressed...[that] we had an interest of some sort in preventing South Vietnam from being taken over by the communists.” Later he added that Kennedy believed in the domino theory and believed that the independence of Southeast Asia “was vital to the American interest including...its relationship to the Indian subcontinent through Burma.” Rostow said: “After the November 1957 conference in Moscow...the North Vietnamese came away with the conviction that they had the backing of both Peking and Moscow in moving to restart the war.” Walt Rostow also claimed that the decision to begin bombing North Vietnam

¹²⁹⁸ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

did not come until February 1965, when “the weight of the North Vietnamese regular units began to be felt very seriously” and “Sukarno had joined Peking.... Peking was announcing Thailand was next.”¹²⁹⁹

Bernard Kalb seemed to agree with arguments about Presidential deception, but generally confined his commentary to previous administrations, reinforcing the perception of the illegitimacy of the war but not necessarily attacking President Nixon’s credibility. At one point he demanded of Arthur Schlesinger that he explain why Kennedy did not tell the public about his deepening commitment of advisors and resources to South Vietnam. On the topic of the backing of the coup to depose Diem, Kalb said: “The United States was saying that it was helping South Vietnam to determine its own future. Wasn't the American involvement an arrogation of power to the United States to decide who would be...ruling in Saigon?”¹³⁰⁰ Of revelations in the Papers that the administration was considering escalating during Johnson’s Presidential campaign, immediately after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Kalb said:

What has shocked many people and produced charges of deliberate deception by President Johnson is the timing of that consensus...reached during the Presidential election contest between President Johnson and Senator Goldwater when Johnson was talking softly and Goldwater was talking bombing.¹³⁰¹

¹²⁹⁹ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹³⁰⁰ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹³⁰¹ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12.

Kalb read excerpts of a memorandum from 16 April 1965 between McGeorge Bundy and Secretaries Rusk and McNamara discussing the “change of mission for all 32 [M]arine battalions in South Vietnam from static defense to ground combat” but warning that “Publicity...must be avoided by all possible precautions” and saying that the administration “should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy.” Kalb asked Max Frankel: “You covered the President in those years. Why didn't he tell the American people about this change at the time?” Frankel responded by citing Stuart Alsop, who “called this first of all an act of self-deception rather than a deliberate effort to deceive the people.”¹³⁰² When Rostow tried to defend the administration by saying that the decision *was* announced on 28 July 1965, Kalb replied:

It was an entire month as I recall...of trying to get various spokesmen for both the White House and the State Department and the Pentagon to acknowledge what, in fact, McGeorge Bundy's memorandum says—that there had been a change of mission.¹³⁰³

The release of the Pentagon Papers, coming after all of the other blows the President had suffered in the first half of 1971, hurt approval of the President and his policies in Vietnam. Nixon began 1971 with a 57 percent approval rating,¹³⁰⁴ but by May the cumulative effect of the Laos Incursion, the Calley Trial, and the VVAW protests had taken their toll; Nixon's approval

Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹³⁰² CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹³⁰³ CBS News, “THE PENTAGON PAPERS--WHAT THEY MEAN/CBS TV/ July 13, 1971,” transcript, CBS News Special Report, 13 July 1971, Series 96 Audiovisual Material, 96.4 Film and Slides (Transcriptions), Box 12. Folder 45, 'The Pentagon Papers-What They Really Mean,' CBS TV, July 13,71, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

¹³⁰⁴ Gallup, “Gallup Poll # 821,” Gallup, 8-11 January 1971.

had dropped to 48 percent.¹³⁰⁵ Approval of the President remained unchanged after the publication of the Pentagon Papers.¹³⁰⁶ Moreover, more Americans (41 percent) once more disapproved than approved (36 percent) of the President's handling of the war in Vietnam.¹³⁰⁷ This almost certainly also resulted from dissatisfaction with the pace of withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. When asked if they were satisfied with the rate of withdrawal of troops, 53 percent of Americans who had an opinion believed the pace was "too slow."¹³⁰⁸

However, a great deal of the American public's impatience to end the war was also a result of disgust with the war itself, an effect almost certainly reinforced by the revelations of the Pentagon Papers that seemed to confirm public perceptions that the war was illegitimate as it had been initiated under false pretenses. By June 1971, 58 percent of Americans believed that the war was "immoral."¹³⁰⁹

President Nixon's announcement that he would go to China in 1972—and possibly the acquittal of Captain Medina in his My Lai massacre trial—significantly improved the President's standing with the American public from these lows. By October 1969, when asked if they were supporters or critics of President Nixon, a majority of Americans who had an opinion (51 percent) said they were "strong" or "moderate supporter[s]" of the President. More importantly for the President, however, his credibility had improved markedly. When asked if they approved or disapproved of the President's "degree of frankness and openness in dealing with the

¹³⁰⁵ Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 830," Gallup, 14-17 May 1971.

¹³⁰⁶ Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 833," Gallup, 25-28 June 1971.

¹³⁰⁷ Roper Organization, *Roper Commercial # 524: Political Questions* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 18-27 October 1971), 8-9.

¹³⁰⁸ Roper Organization, *Roper Commercial # 524: Political Questions* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 18-27 October 1971), 29.

¹³⁰⁹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 300.

American public,” a narrow majority of Americans (51 percent) approved, a jump of nearly 20 percentage points from spring 1971.¹³¹⁰

The President had at least succeeded in separating his personal approval from approval of the Vietnam War. This phenomenon, a separation between the American public’s approval of and desire to end the war and the President’s overall job approval is not insignificant. This is clearly a change from earlier in the Nixon Presidency, when the President was held personally responsible for the conduct of the war and his personal approval was more closely tied to its conduct. Sometime in late 1971, the Vietnam War became a political orphan. It is difficult if not impossible to conclusively identify a cause for this phenomenon, but one possible explanation is that troop levels had dropped significantly from their high of 543,000 in April 1969 to 191,000 in November 1971. Moreover, casualties in Vietnam had dropped significantly; only 66 American service members died in Vietnam in November 1971, the lowest casualty figure since May 1967.¹³¹¹ Perhaps most Americans simply perceived that the war was essentially over and had begun to judge President Nixon on other factors. Still, President Nixon had to fulfill his campaign pledge and end the Vietnam War or else his fate would once more be tied to this unpopular war.

Ending the War

At the beginning of 1972, Richard Nixon could still hope to deliver on his promise from the 1968 Presidential campaign to bring “peace with honor” in Vietnam. However, in order to

¹³¹⁰ Roper Organization, *Roper Commercial # 524: Political Questions* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 18-27 October 1971), 8-10.

¹³¹¹ Center for Military History, “U.S. Army Campaigns: Vietnam,” Center for Military History, United States Army, Fort McNair, D.C., 20 November 2010, accessed 22 September 2014, http://www.history.army.mil/html/reference/army_flag/vn.html.

continue to the North Vietnamese' ambitions in Southeast Asia, President Nixon had to win the 1972 Presidential election. Nixon's strategy to defeat the field of challengers was, first and foremost, to use the containment of Communism to justify continuing the war to an "honorable end." However, to curry favor with voters the administration also occasionally reminded voters that it was Democrats who had started the war, escalated bombing to "punish" the North for not negotiating, or announced progress in negotiations. Nixon and his supporters also sometimes warned of the danger to American prisoners of war if Nixon was not reelected to bring the war to an "honorable end."

The strategy of the field of Presidential hopefuls in 1972 was dramatically different from the strategy of antiwar Presidential candidates in 1968. In 1968, opponents of the war in the Presidential race attacked the Johnson administration's use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify the war. By 1972, in the aftermath of the failed foreign policy revolution, opponents of the war had largely abandoned this strategy. While some of the President's Democratic challengers occasionally attacked the administration's use of containment to justify continuing the Vietnam War, almost all of Nixon's opponents focused the majority of their attacks squarely on the administration's credibility.

To defeat the Democratic field, Republicans occasionally reminded Americans that it was the Democrats who had started the war in Vietnam. For instance, Republican Senator Bob Dole of Kansas told television viewers on the *ABC Evening News*:

Self-righteous denunciations are not going to make anyone forget that McGovern and Humphrey and Muskie and Kennedy...backed the effort to put this nation into Vietnam right up to the hilt. And all of these men who aspire to the Presidency who are now in the Senate voted for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which was tantamount to a declaration of war.... I think those who wrongly sent American boys to Southeast Asia are under an obligation to support the President as he rightly brings them

home.¹³¹²

Dole's analysis, of course, also implicitly supported both the idea that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution *did* give Johnson authority to fight the war and the idea that Senators believed they were voting to authorize a full-scale war when they voted for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution (clearly erroneous, given President Johnson's assurances to the contrary).

Though the crisis of credibility in the Nixon administration from the first half of 1971 had passed, many in the media continued to attack the President's credibility. Eric Sevareid claimed: "The credibility gap in this capital is beginning to take on the proportions of the San Andreas Fault." The occasion of this new claim was the President's statement in a CBS interview that he had renewed bombing of Hanoi because North Vietnam broke its implicit understanding from 1968 that it would not re-escalate the war and because the north had rejected a proposal to return U.S. prisoners of war in exchange for a date certain for withdrawal of U.S. troops. Sevareid said: "Senators and former government officials are now severely challenging both statements."¹³¹³ Sevareid added:

The public has a right to the truth. The government often withholds truth for acceptable reasons, but when it deliberately distorts the truth in public that is another matter. The Pentagon Papers demonstrated that this is what happened repeatedly on Vietnam.¹³¹⁴

¹³¹² Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, "State of The Union / Democratic Response," *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 21 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=17628>.

¹³¹³ Eric Sevareid, "Analysis (Credibility Gap)," *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 05 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220112>.

¹³¹⁴ Eric Sevareid, "Analysis (Credibility Gap)," *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 05 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220112>.

Sevareid concluded: “Admitting mistakes, said Mr. Nixon Sunday night, destroys one’s credibility.... Surely the operating truth is that what destroys credibility...is concealing mistakes and being found out.”¹³¹⁵

Many Congressional dissenters also continued to attack the President’s credibility on the war. In the Democratic Party’s response to the President’s 1972 State of the Union Address, Democratic Senator Frank Church of Idaho simultaneously attacked the President’s credibility and his continued use of containment to justify the war.¹³¹⁶ He said:

President Nixon tells us that we can’t give up the war until we ensure the future of South Vietnam. Common sense tells us that there’s no way to ensure Vietnam’s future. One day, we will have to leave. And when we do, the future of Vietnam will revert to the people who live there, the Vietnamese themselves, in whose hands it should have been left from the beginning.¹³¹⁷

Church concluded: “Until we elect a Democratic President pledged to withdraw all of our remaining forces from Vietnam, we’ll remain chained to this senseless, endless war.”¹³¹⁸

In fact, both Democratic and Republican Presidential hopefuls attacked the Nixon administration’s credibility on Vietnam. Representative Pete McCloskey, Jr. of California told CBS reporter Morton Dean: “I think that this issue of truth in government is perhaps more

¹³¹⁵ Eric Sevareid, “Analysis (Credibility Gap),” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 05 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220112>.

¹³¹⁶ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, “State of The Union / Democratic Response,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 21 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=17628>.

¹³¹⁷ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, “State of The Union / Democratic Response,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 21 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=17628>.

¹³¹⁸ Bob Clark, Howard K. Smith, “State of The Union / Democratic Response,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 21 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=17628>.

important even than Vietnam. The main issue of my campaign today is forcing this government to tell the truth.” When asked if the issue was “going to be the credibility gap,” McCloskey quipped: “There isn’t just a gap in credibility these days. There is no credibility in the Nixon administration.”¹³¹⁹ Many other Presidential hopefuls also attacked the credibility of the Nixon administration. For instance, in a speech in January 1972, Senator Edmund Muskie claimed he was running because “the next president...[must] have the capacity to reach out to every American whoever he or she is, and be *believed!* And be believed!” (emphasis is Muskie’s). In summation, reporter Frank Reynolds said that Muskie believed that positions on individual issues were less important “if the candidate is able to make people trust him.”¹³²⁰

Presumably to silence the field of Presidential challengers and bolster his approval with the American public, the Nixon administration revealed in early 1972 that Henry Kissinger had been involved in secret peace talks with North Vietnam for months and that the administration had proposed a plan for peace. The American public responded very favorably to the revelation of secret peace talks. In the previous year, more Americans had disapproved than approved of the President’s policies in Vietnam. After President Nixon’s revelation of Kissinger’s secret talks, 53 percent of Americans approved of the President’s handling of the war, while only 39 percent disapproved, a dramatic reversal of public opinion. Moreover, the President had successfully used troop withdrawals to purchase credibility with the American people. Of the majority who approved of his policies, 45 percent specifically cited troop withdrawals—not negotiations—as the reason for their approval. By contrast, of the minority who disapproved of

¹³¹⁹ Morton Dean, Roger Mudd, “New Hampshire / McCloskey,” *CBS Evening News*, Sunday, 05 September 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=219564>.

¹³²⁰ Harry Reasoner, Frank Reynolds, “Campaign `72 / Muskie,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 28 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=17735>.

the President's handling of the war, only 30 percent cited the President's dishonesty as the reason for their disapproval.¹³²¹

In an election-year special, Walter Cronkite claimed that the President had "virtually nullified Vietnam as an issue in campaign '72" and inoculated himself against attacks on his credibility with "troop withdrawals and his latest peace offer." McGovern seemed to reject that notion, saying that he would still campaign on a date certain for withdrawal from Vietnam and would also, as reporter Michele Clark put it, "lean more heavily on the credibility gap between the Nixon administration and the American people" and highlight that the American people had "been misled so many times that he [McGovern] has serious doubts that the President has told the whole truth." She also said that McGovern would "increase his attacks on the secrecy of this administration" while emphasizing the "image of honesty and straight-forwardness that McGovern has tried to build." Likewise, Senator Eugene McCarthy denied that the peace plan would neutralize the war as an issue. He also continued his calls for the Viet Cong to be included in a South Vietnamese coalition government.¹³²²

Republican Presidential hopeful Representative Pete McCloskey also continued to run on the war, but, as reporter Ike Pappas put it, he "now admits that the conscious impression amongst most voters is that the war is almost over and that it is no longer a political issue." McCloskey had run on the President's credibility on negotiations, claiming that he was not truly trying to end the war. Pappas continued: "The revelation that the administration has been working secretly for months to end the war has thus weakened McCloskey's argument." Still, McCloskey claimed

¹³²¹ The Gallup Organization, *Gallup Poll # 844* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 4-7 February 1972), 13-19.

¹³²² Michele Clark, Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, Charles Osgood, Ike Pappas, "Campaign '72 / Nixon Peace Proposal," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 28 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220016>.

that the war remained an issue until the prisoners of war were returned and the bombs stopped falling.¹³²³

In late March 1972, the North Vietnamese launched a Spring Offensive that would eventually involve six North Vietnamese Army divisions. This massive conventional assault against South Vietnam offered the administration an opportunity to “get tough” with North Vietnam by dramatically escalating the bombing. However, it also offered the administration’s supporters an opportunity to return to the ideology of containment to justify continuing the war—reminding Americans that the North Vietnamese received their war supplies from the Soviet Union and Communist Chinese. In April 1972, in a report about the Spring Offensive, ABC News reminded its viewers that “80 percent of the military aid given the North Vietnamese comes from the Soviet Union.” In a voiceover of ships in Haiphong Harbor, reporter Roger Peterson added that this aid included “tanks, planes, guns, and ammunition.” Over a picture of antiaircraft guns, Peterson added: “Other weapons include hundreds of antiaircraft guns such as these installed around the outskirts of Hanoi.” Peterson concluded: “The Soviets supplied the equipment to give Hanoi the potential to switch from guerilla warfare to the full scale attacks currently underway.”¹³²⁴

ABC News’ Howard K. Smith also used containment to defend the President’s continuing the war to an “honorable end.” He defended the domino theory and lamented that the President did not remind Americans of the importance of South Vietnam to American security.

¹³²³ Michele Clark, Walter Cronkite, Morton Dean, Charles Osgood, Ike Pappas, “Campaign `72 / Nixon Peace Proposal,” *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 28 January 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220016>.

¹³²⁴ Tom Jarriel, Roger Peterson, Howard K. Smith, “Vietnam / Tonkin Gulf,” *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 19 April 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=20257>.

Smith said that the Nixon administration “has never fully explained why keeping South Vietnam non-Communist is a vital U.S. interest.” He reminded his audience that “Johnson and Kennedy explained it with the domino theory which I believe had validity.” Smith added: “If the Communists seized Vietnam, it would so whet their ambitions and intimidate their neighbors that all South Asia would fall in time.” Smith claimed this would lead, “in time,” to “a bigger war to stop a bigger aggressive coalition.” Smith did admit that China had lost some of its revolutionary zeal and that Indonesia was much less prone to Communist takeover, and he figured that Nixon “did not want to defend the arguments of past administrations that got us *in*. It seemed easier to defend its own policy of getting us *out*” (emphasis is Smith’s). However, Smith concluded that, since “we are clearly doing *more* than getting out” (emphasis is again Smith’s), Nixon owed America an explanation as to why he was “fighting, just as Johnson did, to keep South Vietnam non-Communist.” He needed to explain, Smith said, “exactly why it is worth the sacrifice.”¹³²⁵

In response to these calls for his return to the debate over the Vietnam War, President Nixon did reassert that the containment of Communism required continuing the war. Recalling the bloodbath arguments of the previous administration,¹³²⁶ he said:

If the United States betrays the millions of people who have relied on us in Vietnam, the President of the United States, whoever he is, will not deserve or receive the respect which is essential if the United States is to continue to play the great role we are destined to play, of helping to build a new structure of peace in the world.¹³²⁷

¹³²⁵ Howard K. Smith, “Commentary / Nixon and South Vietnam,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 18 April 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=20253>.

¹³²⁶ Ted Koppel, Harry Reasoner, “Vietnam / Retrospective, Part 2,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 26 January 1973, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=23036>.

¹³²⁷ Ted Koppel, Harry Reasoner, “Vietnam / Retrospective, Part 2,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 26 January 1973, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=23036>.

Nixon also argued that, “If the Communists win militarily in Vietnam, the risk of war in other parts of the world would be enormously increased.”¹³²⁸

Even in the midst of the Spring Offensive, many in the media continued to attack the President’s credibility on the war. Walter Cronkite attacked the administration’s claim that it was withdrawing troops from Vietnam as misleading. He noted that “6,000 GIs were withdrawn from Vietnam last week, but 1,000 Marines were sent there, so the net drop was 5,000.” However, he added, “16,000 additional naval personnel were dispatched for off-shore duty,” but “the Pentagon doesn’t count the men on ships or in Thailand among the 85,000 they say are left in Vietnam.” Still, Cronkite quipped, “simple arithmetic shows that 11,000 more GIs went to the war last week than came home.”¹³²⁹

In May, the President decided to mine Haiphong Harbor to prevent the resupply of North Vietnam by the Soviet Union. This prompted Senator McGovern to mount a rare attack on the administration’s use of containment to justify the continued war in Vietnam, calling the latest move “a flirtation with World War III.” McGovern added that the administration had usurped the powers of the Senate, saying: “If the President can, without the approval of the Congress, place mines before the ships of other nations, then the constitutional war powers of the Congress are dead.” McGovern claimed that Nixon was treating the Presidency as “an elected dictatorship.” Former Vice President Hubert Humphrey was only slightly less critical, saying: “the course he [Nixon] has chosen is filled with unpredictable danger.” Humphrey added: “It

¹³²⁸ Ted Koppel, Harry Reasoner, “Vietnam / Retrospective, Part 2,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 26 January 1973, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=23036>.

¹³²⁹ Walter Cronkite, Bruce Dunning, Bob Schieffer, “Vietnam / Offensive,” *CBS Evening News*, Monday, 17 April 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=222552>.

offers no real hope of ending the war, nor of protecting American forces. It does not speed up the date of the withdrawal of American forces.”¹³³⁰

In answer to protests over the blockade of Haiphong, conservative Democratic Presidential candidate and Alabama Governor George Wallace joined President Nixon and his supporters in using the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a weapon against his liberal Democratic opponents. Wallace said: “these liberal Senators...all of ‘em voted for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that got us into the war, but once we got into it, then they ran around and said don’t get it over with, don’t win it.” He added that this vacillation was “the cause of the...predicament that we are in now.”¹³³¹

As McGovern pulled into the lead in the Democratic primary race, his campaign began to coalesce around attacks on the administration’s credibility, its handling of the economy, and its handling of the war. McGovern also challenged President Nixon to reveal the source of his campaign funds.¹³³² A weapon that Nixon’s supporters frequently wielded against George McGovern was the fate of prisoners of war in North Vietnam. Veteran John O’Neill, leader of Concerned Vietnam Veterans for Nixon, was among the speakers at a sparsely attended rally in Washington, D.C. He said: “Senator McGovern promises peace through massive defense cuts and through a unilateral withdrawal in Vietnam that would leave our brothers rotting in North Vietnamese jails.” In an *ABC Evening News* story about the rally, attendee Elizabeth Hill (identified in a caption as “P.O.W. wife”) added, “We must not let Senator McGovern’s naïve

¹³³⁰ Howard K. Smith, “Vietnam / Blockade-Candidates Reaction,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 09 May 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=20931>.

¹³³¹ Howard K. Smith, “Vietnam / Blockade-Candidates Reaction,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 09 May 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=20931>.

¹³³² Harry Reasoner, Howard K. Smith, “Campaign ‘72 / McGovern-Issues,” *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 28 July 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=21695>.

and unrealistic thinking render futile the efforts to bring our prisoners home. It's not going to be as simple as just pulling out our troops and begging." A man identified as Dwight Reeves added that McGovern had helped send these prisoners of war to Vietnam "in 1964 when he voted for the Tonkin Resolution."¹³³³ This, of course, once more suggested, first, that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had given Johnson authority to prosecute the war and, second, ignored the fact that Johnson had assured Senators he would not use the Resolution to escalate the conflict.

Reporter Frank Tomlinson did question the credibility of the group—and implicitly the President's credibility—in his summation of the story. He said: "This group denied any connection with the White House or the Committee to Re-elect the President, saying that most of the veterans supporting Nixon are Democrats."¹³³⁴ What Tomlinson didn't know was that, in fact, John O'Neill had stood in the Oval Office a year earlier and received marching orders directly from President Nixon on how to attack the antiwar movement.¹³³⁵

Another frequent attack against McGovern was that his campaign made peace in Vietnam less likely. After McGovern sent supporter Pierre Salinger to Paris to talk to North Vietnamese negotiators, White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler said this would make negotiations tougher, adding: "We are concerned." Republican Senator Robert Griffin of Michigan decried the move in a speech at a press conference from the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach: "Senator McGovern doesn't stand a chance in November unless the Vietnam War continues until after Election Day." Griffin claimed that this was the only explanation for why

¹³³³ Howard K. Smith, Frank Tomlinson, "Campaign '72 / Vietnam Veterans," *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 28 July 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=21699>.

¹³³⁴ Howard K. Smith, Frank Tomlinson, "Campaign '72 / Vietnam Veterans," *ABC Evening News*, Friday, 28 July 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=21699>.

¹³³⁵ Douglas Brinkley and Luke Nichter, eds., *The Nixon Tapes*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 182.

“an amateur diplomat from Senator McGovern’s entourage would meddle and inject himself into the official negotiations which are going on to end the war and release the prisoners of war.” On McGovern’s initial denials that he had sent Salinger, Griffin added: “Senator McGovern’s credibility, which was something less than a thousand percent, that...credibility *gap*...has now widened until it is as wide as the Atlantic Ocean” (emphasis is Griffin’s). Even NBC reporter John Chancellor admitted: “The Salinger affair has given McGovern something of a credibility problem,” adding: “He first said he had given Salinger no instructions to talk to the North Vietnamese in Paris.... Then he said he had done so.”¹³³⁶

McGovern counterattacked against Nixon’s credibility, saying: “The Nixon administration has had three and a half years to bring the war to an end and bring our prisoners of war home, and it has failed to accomplish that objective.” He added that Henry Kissinger was presently “on a highly publicized global junket on the eve of the Republican National Convention. And *that* is what is interfering with quiet, serious professional negotiating far more than anyone else possibly could” (emphasis is McGovern’s). He concluded: “Mr. Nixon has manipulated Mr. Kissinger and he has manipulated American public opinion to appear to be negotiating seriously, when actually he has been stalling to prop up General Thieu’s government in Saigon.”¹³³⁷

As the election approached, the Watergate scandal that would ultimately end the Nixon Presidency began to become an additional target for reporters wanting to attack the President’s

¹³³⁶ NBC Evening News, “Campaign `72 / Vietnam-McGovern and Salinger,” NBC Evening News, 17 August 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=465635&Row=19>.

¹³³⁷ NBC Evening News, “Campaign `72 / Vietnam-McGovern and Salinger,” NBC Evening News, 17 August 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 9 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.er.lib.k-state.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=2013010979528808&code=tvn&RC=465635&Row=19>.

credibility. In October 1972, Eric Sevareid claimed: “One reason for apparent public apathy about the Watergate scandal is widespread suspicion of press honesty and fairness.” Sevareid blamed this suspicion of the press on “prolonged attacks by the President’s chosen instrument, Vice President Agnew,” which began in 1969.¹³³⁸ Sevareid claimed that this was part of a calculated strategy:

Mr. Nixon had carefully studied the Johnson credibility gap. And what better way to avoid or postpone your own credibility gap as the inevitable troubles arise than to impugn in advance the credibility of those trying to report and explain your actions. In sum, professional political propagandists managed to persuade a fair part of the public that practicing journalists were the propagandists.¹³³⁹

On the eve of the Presidential election, it was clear that Richard Nixon would win by a landslide. ABC reporter Eric Sevareid blamed issues that had weakened the Democratic Party:

They include the three Kennedy tragedies: Dallas, Los Angeles, Chappaquiddick. They include an undeclared, uncomprehended, inconclusive but frightful war. They include the rise of crime, riots, and youthful violence. The convulsive resurgence of Black Americans.¹³⁴⁰

Sevareid added: “The great governing center of the American electorate is apprehensive about all these things. And President Nixon has apparently managed to identify with this center.”

McGovern, Sevareid said, “began by denying the existence of the center, believing that minority groups and viewpoints could be welded into a majority poll.” However, Sevareid also blamed

¹³³⁸ Eric Sevareid, “Analysis (Republican Spies and President),” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 25 October 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220411>.

¹³³⁹ Eric Sevareid, “Analysis (Republican Spies and President),” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 25 October 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=220411>.

¹³⁴⁰ Bernard Kalb, Dan Rather, Roger Mudd, Mike Wallace, John Hart, Bruce Hall, Richard Threlkeld, Bruce Morton, Bob Schieffer,; Sylvia Chase, Eric Sevareid, “Camapign '72: Two Days To Go,” *CBS Special Report*, Sunday, 05 November 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=659060>.

Nixon's impending victory on an underhanded appeal to America's darker instincts. He called McGovern "an evangelist amongst us, asking us to look into our own souls." He concluded: "That is too painful. Much easier to harken to the one who tells us over and over that the fault lies with those other guys."¹³⁴¹

Despite the seeming inevitability of his defeat, George McGovern continued to attack President Nixon's credibility right up to Election Day. In an interview with CBS' Bruce Morton and Bob Schieffer just before the election, Senator George McGovern claimed that the President's credibility gap on Vietnam was a symptom of a deeper immorality in the Nixon administration, also evidenced by the growing Watergate scandal. McGovern said: "The moral standards of the government have deteriorated very rapidly under the present administration." For the Nixon administration, he added, "it's politics as usual, for one political committee to wiretap the headquarters of another. And to maintain a fund that we believe to be at least \$700 thousand that is used for no other purpose except political sabotage." The war was also immoral. McGovern said: "Beyond that...there's the continuance of this war, the tragic level of bombardment that has continued. I really regard it as evil." McGovern now claimed that the *absence* of U.S. troops in Vietnam was immoral: "I regard it as immoral that for the first time in our history, we're involved in an enterprise that we're not willing anymore to die for ourselves but we're stilling willing to kill for...even when innocent people's lives are involved." He concluded that the election was "really a contest between good and evil." McGovern also hinted that the looming prospect of a peace settlement was a lie: "there was simply the hope of a

¹³⁴¹ Bernard Kalb, Dan Rather, Roger Mudd, Mike Wallace, John Hart, Bruce Hall, Richard Threlkeld, Bruce Morton, Bob Schieffer,; Sylvia Chase, Eric Sevareid, "Camapign '72: Two Days To Go," *CBS Special Report*, Sunday, 05 November 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=659060>.

settlement which was escalated into a virtual promise of peace.” In response to Morton’s question about whether there was “a public feeling of having been conned about the war by the administration,” McGovern added: “There has been too much deception both here at home and now even in the issue of war and peace itself.” He summarized the President’s claim: “He said to the American people, well we’re not going to have peace before the election, but if you trust me for another four years, we will have peace after the election.” McGovern reminded Americans: “That’s the same thing he told us four years ago and I think it’s going to be widely rejected at the polls on Tuesday.”¹³⁴²

It wasn’t rejected. Nixon was re-elected in 1972, and his post-election bombing of the North (the so-called “Christmas bombing”), convinced the South Vietnamese to agree to the accord reached with North Vietnam in Paris. However, because of troop withdrawals, the Nixon administration had long since ran out of sufficient forces in South Vietnam to threaten North Vietnamese ambitions and force better terms at the negotiating table. Ultimately, rather than an “honorable end” to the war that preserved the goal of containment of Communism in Southeast Asia, the U.S. was forced to accept the continuing presence of North Vietnamese forces in the south, a humiliating compromise that set the stage for the eventual destruction of South Vietnam.¹³⁴³

The framework of debate over the war established in 1968—between supporters using containment to justify continuing the war to an “honorable end” and opponents attacking the

¹³⁴² Bernard Kalb, Dan Rather, Roger Mudd, Mike Wallace, John Hart, Bruce Hall, Richard Threlkeld, Bruce Morton, Bob Schieffer,; Sylvia Chase, Eric Sevareid, “Camapign ’72: Two Days To Go,” *CBS Special Report*, Sunday, 05 November 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=659060>.

¹³⁴³ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 318-319.

President's credibility—remained the framework for debate of the war until the end of U.S. military involvement in 1973.

Throughout his Presidency, President Nixon, his administration, and supporters of the war from the former administration and from the media used the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify continuing the war in Vietnam to an “honorable peace.” In contrast, by the time of the inauguration of President Richard Nixon, attacks on the use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify the Vietnam War and on the broader foreign policy paradigm of military containment were rare. Much more frequently, opponents of the war attacked the administration's credibility on the initiation, conduct, and resolution of the war. These themes became the dominant critique throughout the remainder of the Vietnam War.

A number of events threatened to destroy Nixon's credibility and bring the war to an earlier end. Nixon's decision to use U.S. troops to invade Cambodia in 1970—an expansion of the conflict by any measure—called into question the administration's true willingness to end the war. The abysmal performance of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam during its invasion of Laos called into question the credibility of the President's policy of Vietnamization of the war. The publicity surrounding the end of the My Lai massacre trials put American war crimes at the forefront of Americans' minds just as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War led massive demonstrations in Washington against an administration that they claimed was lying to the American people about the true brutality of the war. Finally, the release of the Pentagon Papers both contributed to the already pervasive public perception that the war was illegitimate because it had been initiated deceptively and provided a platform for the Nixon administration's opponents to attack its credibility.

President Nixon's best, most effective weapon against attacks on his credibility was troop withdrawals, which most in the American public interpreted as the administration making good on its pledge to end the war. This formula—using troop withdrawals to buy credibility with the American people—was established early in the war to counter dissenters' first and most effective attack on the Nixon administration's credibility: that the President was not truly trying to end the war. The President would return to this tactic repeatedly to sustain his credibility with the American people. Later in the war, the President could also tout progress in negotiations, reduced casualties, and reduced bombing as a sign of progress in the war to "purchase" credibility with the American public.

The members of the foreign policy revolution—that small subset of the broader antiwar movement that had sought not just to end the war but also to move the United States beyond a foreign policy founded in the ideology of military containment of Communism—remained in the public debate over the war after their revolution collapsed in 1968. While revolutionaries in Congress were not able to move the United States beyond a foreign policy of containment as they had once hoped, they were successful in progressively limiting Presidential power in foreign policy. Their first modest victory came in the passage of the National Commitments Resolution in 1969. However, this first victory was followed by others. In the aftermath of the 1970 Cambodian Incursion, Congressional foreign policy revolutionaries succeeded in passing the Cooper-Church amendment to prevent the administration from supporting South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. They also succeeded in getting a repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. These revolutionaries would see further victories after the end of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, including the Case-Church amendment to block further U.S. military intervention in

Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia and, finally, the 1973 War Powers Act that reasserted Congressional power in war-making.

The radical revolutionaries of the foreign policy revolution were less successful in achieving progress toward their aims after 1968. Many radical protesters simply abandoned the antiwar movement, moving to other causes or fading into the counterculture. A few moved from more benign anti-imperialist rhetoric to militant opposition to what they called American imperialism, further separating themselves from the mainstream of American society. And a tiny minority, the most militant of these radicals, actually turned to Communist insurgency against their own country.

The framework for public debate of foreign policy issues established in the latter half of the Vietnam War—between supporters of military intervention using justifications based on the ideology of containment and dissenters attacking the administration's credibility—would have a lasting impact on American foreign policy far beyond the Vietnam War. First, because opponents of intervention attacked the administration's credibility rather than its use of containment to justify intervention or the ideology of containment itself, the American public continued to embrace the Cold War consensus after the Vietnam War. Second, this framework for debate of foreign policy would frequently recur in the debate of other military interventions throughout the remainder of the Cold War. Nearly every time a military intervention was contemplated by the administration, this pattern of public debate repeated itself.

Chapter 6 - Consequences and Conclusions

The framework for public debate about the Vietnam War established in 1968—between supporters using containment to justify continuing the war and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—remained the framework for debate of the war until the end of U.S. military participation in the conflict in 1973. The change in the opposition’s strategy for public debate over the war in 1968—from attacking the administration’s use of containment to justify the war to attacking the administration’s credibility—had two significant consequences that reverberated through the end of the Cold War.

First, opponents of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam changed their strategy for opposition in 1968, from attacking the ideology of containment to attacking the administration’s credibility, assertions of the ideology of military containment of Communism—the core of the Cold War consensus—remained largely unchallenged from 1968 through the end of the war. While it is difficult if not impossible to show true causality, it is not surprising that, after the war, most in the American public continued to embrace the Cold War consensus, even if a significant portion of the foreign policymaking elite in and out of government had abandoned part or all of it.

Second, the framework for debate established during the latter half of the Vietnam War—between those using the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify military intervention and those opposing military intervention by attacking the administration’s credibility—frequently reemerged when interventions were contemplated throughout the remainder of the Cold War. When North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam in 1975, the new Ford administration contemplated military intervention to contain this Communist expansion. The framework of public debate of foreign policy established during the latter half of the Vietnam

War reasserted itself. When Ronald Reagan took office, he advocated a series of military interventions to block or roll back Communist expansion in Central America—and used the ideology of containment to justify these interventions. The framework of foreign policy debate established during the Vietnam War once more reasserted itself and opponents quickly returned to attacks on the Reagan administration’s credibility to slow or block these interventions.

The Popular and Elite Cold War Consensus

While it is difficult to demonstrate true causality, it appears that, because opponents of the war largely stopped attacking the ideology of military containment of Communism and its application to the war in Vietnam in 1968 and instead began attacking the administration’s credibility, the American public continued to embrace the ideology of military containment of Communism—the core of the Cold War consensus—after the end of the Vietnam War.

However, the Cold War consensus among Members of Congress and other foreign policy leaders in and out of government—the foreign policy elite—was broken. Some members of this elite continued to embrace some or all of the precepts of containment after the war, while others rejected them.

As was noted in the introduction, this dissertation rests on the findings of political scientist Eugene R. Wittkopf that the Cold War consensus was both an elite consensus on foreign policy and a popular consensus on the use of force to contain Communism. Political scientist Eugene R. Wittkopf describes the Cold War consensus as both a public and a governmental consensus. “Anticommunism,” Wittkopf writes, “provided much of the glue of the foreign policy consensus,” as did “presidential dominance in foreign affairs and bipartisanship in congressional-executive relations.” He uses public opinion polling data to show that there was

also a broad public consensus on the use of force to protect other countries from the spread of Communism.¹³⁴⁴

As was likewise noted at the beginning of this study, this dissertation also rests in part on the findings of historians Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, and Jon Cowans and political scientist James Meernik. Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall cite the 1966 Fulbright hearings as a defining moment in the history of the Cold War consensus, writing that these hearings called into question the suitability of the Vietnam War within the context of the Cold War. They also contend that most Congressional leaders were reticent to publicly challenge the Cold War paradigm, even after these hearings.¹³⁴⁵ Jon Cowans uses media and public reaction to movies about the Vietnam War (with movie critics panning war movies later in the war while they remained box office hits) to show that, while media elites may have abandoned the Cold War consensus, the consensus remained a powerful political force among the American people.¹³⁴⁶ James Meernik, uses Congressional votes to show that the end of the Cold War consensus in Congress was a direct result of the Vietnam War.¹³⁴⁷

A synthesis of the findings of these scholars points to a bifurcated Cold War consensus which existed both as a popular consensus among the broader American public and an elite consensus held by Congressional and other foreign policy leaders in and out of government.

This Cold War consensus was an agreement on the elements of the ideology of military

¹³⁴⁴ Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1990), 5-9.

¹³⁴⁵ Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2009), 241-242.

¹³⁴⁶ Jon Cowans, "A Deepening Disbelief; The American Movie Hero in Vietnam, 1958-1968," *The Journal of American - East Asian Relations* Vol. 17, Iss. 4 (2010), 324.

¹³⁴⁷ James Meernik, "Presidential Support in Congress: Conflict and Consensus on Foreign and Defense Policy," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Aug., 1993): 569-587.

containment of Communism. The Vietnam War broke this consensus among foreign policy elites; some continued to hold some or all of the precepts of military containment, while others no longer believed in military containment at all. However, most in the broader American public continued to hold most or all of the precepts of the ideology of military containment of Communism after the Vietnam War.

Looking back through this study to the rhetoric of military containment used by two administrations and their supporters to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, one can easily identify the precepts of the ideology of military containment. Central to this ideology were the lessons of Munich that aggression must be deterred or else met early, or it would only grow in danger. This larger principle was the foundation of the subordinate principle of the domino theory that once one country falls to aggression, adjacent countries will follow (since the appetite of aggression only “grows with feeding,” as members of the Johnson administration frequently said). Another element of this ideology was the myth of American altruism; the United States had no territorial ambitions and was only forward deployed to defend the freedom of others. The next component of this ideology was the zero sum game; a fall of any country or region of the free world to Communism would damage U.S. national security. The final element of this ideology was the central importance of the United States in the latticework of security agreements—such as NATO and SEATO—to the security of the free world; if the United States failed to honor one commitment, other allies would begin to doubt America’s commitment to them as well, possibly causing them to slip into the orbit of the Communist world.

These core ideas of the ideology of military containment of Communism—which Eugene R. Wittkopf calls the core of the Cold War consensus¹³⁴⁸—rested on a more foundational set of core meta-principles that were held by most Americans—in the broader public and the elite—but were seldom stated explicitly. At the center of the idea of the lessons of Munich was the meta-principle that Communists were aggressive, bent on world conquest, and had to be deterred; with the rise of Communist China, the threat of this aggression to the third world—through “wars of liberation”—became a particular concern. The second, and perhaps more fundamental meta-principle that undergirded the ideology of military containment was the necessity of military strength—one could not deter or stop aggression as the lessons of Munich demanded if one did not have a military force with which to deter or actually intervene militarily. Perhaps a sub-principle of this main meta-principle was the idea of forward deployment of this military force along the periphery of the Communist world. This sub-principle was carefully interlaced with the myth of American altruism—U.S. bases abroad were not U.S. territories but a form of military assistance to protect the freedom of U.S. allies from Communist aggression.

It is nearly impossible to show causation in mass politics, but this study has shown that in 1968 the Senate Foreign Relations Committee stopped attacking the ideology of military containment—which Eugene R. Wittkopf calls the core of the Cold War consensus¹³⁴⁹—and instead began attacking the administration’s credibility. This dissertation has also shown that Senator J. William Fulbright and his staff decided on this change in opposition strategy because they believed that Americans continued to embrace the Cold War consensus and rejected those—

¹³⁴⁸ Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1990), 5-9.

¹³⁴⁹ Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1990), 5-9.

like radical protesters and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—who were attacking it.¹³⁵⁰ Finally, this dissertation has shown that other opponents of the war quickly followed suit until, by the end of 1968, attacks on the administration’s use of containment became very rare.

This dissertation has also shown that Senator J. William Fulbright and his staff were right in 1968; the public continued to embrace the Cold War consensus—a belief in the ideology of military containment of Communism—through the end of the war. The way the public continued to reject radical protesters who attacked the ideology of containment, the way the public responded to Presidential and Congressional peace candidates in 1968, and the way the public responded in poll questions on their sentiments about continuing the war to an “honorable end” (which this dissertation has shown to have been most often interpreted as an end that preserved the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia) all indicate that Americans accepted the ideology of military containment of Communism and its application to Vietnam.

Attacks on the ideology of containment of Communism and its application to the war in Vietnam largely stopped after 1968. The Cold War consensus survived until the end of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Thus, while it is impossible to prove true causation, it is probable that the Cold War consensus among the public did not end because opponents of the war stopped attacking it.

¹³⁵⁰ Don Henderson, memorandum for Carl Marcy disagreeing with proposed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on US as a world power, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 14 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR); Peter Riddleberger [staffer, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations], memorandum for Carl Marcy disagreeing with proposed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on US as a world power, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 19 December 1967, in Series 48 FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 48-3 Committee Administration, Box 16, Folder 4, 1967, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas, (Fayetteville, AR).

Moreover, polling data seems to indicate that the American public continued to hold to the Cold War consensus—this belief in military containment of Communism—even after the war. Of course, pollsters did not directly ask Americans, “do you believe in the Cold War consensus,” but their answers to a number of questions, ranging from their belief in continued United States military strength to where that strength should be postured to when that strength should be used in direct military intervention to block Communist expansion indicates that they still believed the precepts of military containment.

A year after the end of America’s participation in the Vietnam War, most in the American public clearly still believed in maintaining the tools of military containment and were worried about the threat of the Communist countries military containment was intended to address. Americans were asked if the country had “made progress” or “lost ground” in different areas. When asked about the area of “maintaining respect for the United States in other countries,” a majority of Americans who had an opinion (51 percent) said the country had “lost some” or “lost much ground.” However, most Americans’ prescription for restoring the United States’ position in the world was renewed military strength. When asked their opinion about “spending for defense and military purposes,” a majority of Americans who had an opinion (60 percent) believed spending should be “increased” or “kept at [its] present level.” Moreover, when asked how concerned they were about a certain series of problems, Americans clearly indicated that they still believed at least in the aims of military containment. A majority of Americans who had an opinion were concerned “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about “maintaining respect for the U.S. in other countries” (78 percent), “maintaining close relations

with our allies” (78 percent), “the problem of Communist China” (65 percent), “the problem of the Soviet Union” (70 percent), and “the threat of Communism” (68 percent).¹³⁵¹

Most Americans also explicitly endorsed maintaining a large military presence, forward deployed as it was on the periphery of the Communist world in Europe and Asia to discourage Communist expansion. When asked what the United States should do “over the next few” years with its total military power, even when reminded of “the high cost of more defense and military forces,” 44 percent of Americans who had an opinion believed America’s military power should be “kept at [its] present level” while 43 percent believed it should be “increased.” And Americans believed that these forces should be used to contain Communism; when asked about America’s “substantial military forces stationed in Western Europe for defense purposes,” 56 percent of Americans who had an opinion believed this force should be “kept at [its] present level.” Even more Americans (58 percent) believed that “military forces stationed in Asia for defense purposes, including in Japan, South Korea, and Thailand,” should be “kept at [their] present level.”¹³⁵²

Admittedly, the polling data is more ambiguous on the question of whether the American people were still willing to use military force to actually fight against Communist expansion and where they were willing to do so. By a narrow margin most Americans who had an opinion (51 percent) were no longer willing to “take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to prevent the spread of Communism to any other parts of the free world.” But the operative word here was “any” and this particular poll was silent on the question of specific areas Americans

¹³⁵¹ Gallup Organization, *State of the Nation, 1974* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 20 April 1974), 33-34, 42-43, 91-92.

¹³⁵² Gallup Organization, *State of the Nation, 1974* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 20 April 1974), 112-117.

would be willing to “use armed force” to protect from Communism. Moreover, by an even greater margin most Americans (52 percent) were willing to, “at all costs, even going to the very brink of war if necessary,” do anything to ensure the United States “maintain[ed] its dominant position as the world’s most powerful nation.”¹³⁵³

However, this poll was not ambiguous at all in showing that Americans believed they had sacrificed enough blood and treasure for Vietnam. When asked if they believed the United States had “under the circumstances made the best deal it could to settle the conflict” in Vietnam, the majority of Americans (77 percent) who had an opinion, said that it had. Moreover, most Americans had no appetite for providing *any* support to South Vietnam. When asked if the “United States should continue to provide military equipment and supplies to the government of South Vietnam to help it combat the Communist forces,” a majority of Americans who expressed an opinion (56 percent) said the United States “should not.”¹³⁵⁴ These sentiments were almost certainly in the forefront of the minds of Members of Congress as they considered President Ford’s request to renew U.S. military intervention to rescue South Vietnam from a North Vietnamese offensive a year later.

There was a clear divide between young and old—especially among young college students—on the Cold War consensus. Younger Americans both were less passionate about maintaining the tools of military containment and were less apt to believe in the altruism of American foreign policy. In spring 1973, young college students, by a margin of 79 percent, favored “cutting back defense spending and using the money for domestic needs.” Like the

¹³⁵³ Gallup Organization, *State of the Nation, 1974* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 20 April 1974), 112-117.

¹³⁵⁴ Gallup Organization, *State of the Nation, 1974* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 20 April 1974), 112-117.

majority of Americans, 60 percent of college students opposed using “American money and know-how to help rebuild North Vietnam.” Eighty-nine percent of college students “strongly” or “partially” agreed with the statement that “our foreign policy is based on our own narrow economic and power interests.”¹³⁵⁵

However, despite nearly a decade of radical protests against the use of containment to justify the Vietnam War and the ideology of containment itself, most college students had not been radicalized. Sixty-seven percent of students partially or strongly agreed that they were “sick and tired of hearing people attack patriotism, morality, and other American values.” Only 18 percent of college students believed “radical change” or “an entirely new” “American society” and “American life” to be needed. Most American college students did not see themselves as radicals or identify with radical politics. When asked in spring 1973, only eight percent of college students felt “a sense of identification” with “the New Left,” only seven percent identified with “the counterculture,” only six percent identified with “The Movement,” and only four percent identified with “the Old Left.” Admittedly, these students were not much more amenable to mainstream politics; only 21 percent identified with “conservatives” and only 34 percent identified with “liberals.”¹³⁵⁶

While young college students were less apt to accept some of the goals of military containment—the core of the Cold War consensus—than older Americans, they did still believe in others. Admittedly, when asked what values were worth fighting for, more college students said “containing communism” and “maintaining our position in the world” were “not worth

¹³⁵⁵ Yankelovich, Skelly & White, *Yankelovich, Skelly & White Poll # 1973-COLL: Youth Study, 1973--College Sample* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, Late Spring 1973), 7, 21-33.

¹³⁵⁶ Yankelovich, Skelly & White, *Yankelovich, Skelly & White Poll # 1973-COLL: Youth Study, 1973--College Sample* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, Late Spring 1973), 21-33, 85-88.

fighting for” than “worth fighting for.” However by a larger margin, more college students said “protecting our allies,” “counteracting aggression,” and “protecting our national interests” were “worth fighting for” than said that these were “not worth fighting for.”¹³⁵⁷ These were the same arguments, based on the ideology of containment, that both the Johnson and the Nixon administration had used to justify the Vietnam War.

Young people who were not college students were asked these same questions by pollsters. As with the other polls from this period, there is no conclusive proof that young non-students did embrace the Cold War consensus. However, their answer do show that, on the questions they were asked, non-student youth held more of the precepts of the Cold War consensus than their counterparts in college. By a huge margin, more of these young people believed “containing communism” and “maintaining our position in the world” were “worth fighting for” than “not worth fighting for.” The majority of non-student youth even believed “fighting for our honor” was “worth fighting for.” Still, neither a majority of college students nor a majority of non-student youth believed “keeping a commitment” was “worth fighting for.”¹³⁵⁸ Whether student or non-student, young people felt less strongly about the elements of the ideology of military containment of Communism than their older counterparts.

While it appears that the American people at large continued to hold to the Cold War consensus, the Cold War consensus amongst the elite coterie of foreign policy formulators was significantly weaker. The Council on Foreign Relations conducted a poll of foreign policy “leaders” that shows that they did not share the beliefs of many Americans in the goals of

¹³⁵⁷ Yankelovich, Skelly & White, *Yankelovich, Skelly & White Poll # 1973-COLL: Youth Study, 1973--College Sample* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, Late Spring 1973), 50-51.

¹³⁵⁸ Yankelovich, Skelly & White, *Yankelovich, Skelly & White Poll # 1973-PUB: Youth Study, 1973—Non-College Sample* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, Late Spring 1973), 50-51.

containment. A comparison of such disparate populations conducted by different pollsters at different times is clearly imperfect, and direct comparisons are dangerous, but this poll by itself does show that foreign policy leaders did not believe as strongly in retaining the tools of military containment as the American populace at large. The Council on Foreign Relations found that a majority of these leaders (56 percent) wanted “defense spending” “cut back,” while 33 percent wanted spending “kept [the] same.” Still, of those leaders who would cut spending, 56 percent would not cut back spending “if it meant that our military strength would fall behind that of the Soviet Union.” The majority of these leaders (73 percent) wanted “military aid to other nations...cut back.” Nearly two thirds of these leaders wanted “secret political operations of the CIA...cut back.” These leaders were reluctant to use military force to assist “friendly countries” if they “are attacked.” Only 32 percent said they would, “if necessary, send American troops and manpower” along with “military aid [and] economic aid” to assist friendly countries. In contrast, 44 percent would send “some military aid as well as economic aid, but...not involve any American troops or manpower.”¹³⁵⁹

However, when asked about specific countries, there were situations where even these foreign policy leaders would use military force to contain the expansion of Communism. When asked which specific situations would justify “U.S. military involvement, including the use of U.S. troops,” a majority said that they would deploy troops if “Western Europe were invaded” (75 percent) or “the Russians took over West Berlin” (53 percent).¹³⁶⁰

¹³⁵⁹ Louis Harris and Associates, *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Poll # 1974-2436L: American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1974: Leaders* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-29 December 1974), 33-41, 75-82, 5-8, 33-41, 44-70

¹³⁶⁰ Louis Harris and Associates, *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Poll # 1974-2436L: American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1974: Leaders* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-29 December 1974), 33-41, 75-82, 5-8, 33-41, 44-70

Moreover, these leaders continued to support providing military aid and forces to Europe and were at least concerned about the threat of Communist expansion into a number of areas around the world. Sixty-one percent of these leaders would “keep [our] commitment what it is” to NATO and a majority of leaders surveyed by the Council of Foreign Relations believed that it “would be [a] threat to the United States” if countries in many regions turned Communist—including “Western European Countries” (65 percent), “Japan” (63 percent), and “Latin American countries” (52 percent).¹³⁶¹ These leaders still supported military containment in Europe and were at least concerned about Communist expansion into other areas.

These same foreign policy leaders still believed in internationalism and embraced at least some of the tools, tactics, and goals of containment. The vast majority of these leaders (98 percent) wanted the United States to continue to “take an active part in world affairs.” Likewise, while they may have rejected some of the instruments of military containment, a majority of these leaders (83 percent) still believed that the “willingness” of the United States “to make military commitments to other countries and to keep them” was either “very” or “somewhat important.” Even more telling, a majority of these leaders (81 percent) still believed that the goal of “containing communism” was “very” or “somewhat important.” Likewise, an overwhelming majority (95 percent) believed “defending our allies’ security” was “very” or “somewhat important” and nearly as many (90 percent) accepted the lessons of Munich that it was “very” or “somewhat important” to protect “weaker nations against foreign aggression.” Likewise, a majority of these leaders (76 percent) agreed “strongly” or “somewhat” that “the only way peace can exist in this world is when a country like the United States who wants peace is strong enough

¹³⁶¹ Louis Harris and Associates, *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Poll # 1974-2436L: American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1974: Leaders* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-29 December 1974), 33-41, 75-82, 5-8, 33-41, 44-70

to back up warnings to possible aggressor nations that they can't get away with aggression.” The majority of these leaders (90 percent) even believed it was “justified” “to back governments which believe in our free enterprise system but not in democracy” if “there is some advantage to the United States in it” (a consequence of the ideology of containment that drew deep criticism in the first half of the Vietnam War, when critics frequently attacked the application of the ideology of containment to the war).¹³⁶²

Counterintuitively, in 1976, a year after the fall of Saigon that marked the final loss of America’s Vietnam War and during a severe economic downturn in the United States that made American resources sparse, it appears that even more Americans embraced the Cold War consensus than had done so in 1974. While the polling data is once more incomplete, when asked about many elements of the ideology of military containment of Communism—the core of the Cold War consensus—more Americans agreed with these precepts than had in 1974. In June 1976, Americans were still willing to spend money to maintain the tools of America’s foreign policy of military containment around the world. When asked about the “amount the United States is now spending for defense and military purposes” over two thirds of Americans believed that spending should either be “increased” or kept at its “present level.” This despite the fact that a majority of Americans (55 percent) identified economic fears, such as “deterioration in or inadequate standard of living,” “unemployment,” or “economic instability” as their greatest fears. In spite of these fears, even when told “the U.S. is now spending a good deal abroad” to maintain “military bases in many parts of the world and the military forces stationed there,” a majority of Americans (53 percent) still wanted spending on stationing of forces abroad

¹³⁶² Louis Harris and Associates, *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Poll # 1974-2436L: American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1974: Leaders* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, 10-29 December 1974), 33-41, 44-70

“increased” or kept at its “present level.” Moreover, two thirds of Americans who had an opinion believed that, if they were attacked by the Soviet Union, the United States should “come to the defense of its major European allies with military force.” A majority of Americans (53 percent) believed America should also “come to the defense of Japan with military force if it is attacked by Soviet Russia or Communist China.” A majority of Americans who had an opinion (55 percent) believed that “the U.S. should maintain its dominant position as the world's most powerful nation at all costs, even going to the very brink of war if necessary.” More importantly, a narrow majority of Americans who had an opinion (just over 50 percent) now believed that “the U.S. should take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to prevent the spread of Communism to any other party of the free world.” Again, the operative word in this question was “any,” and this was a reversal from 1974, when a narrow majority would *not* use armed force to protect “any” part of the free world. Americans were also more concerned than they had been in 1974 about the threats with which military containment was meant to contend. Fifty-eight percent of Americans were concerned “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about “the problem of Communist China,” while 68 percent were concerned “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about “the problem of the Soviet Union,” and 73 percent were concerned “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about “the threat of Communism.”¹³⁶³

The Enduring Framework for Debate of Military Intervention

In 1968, opponents of the war largely stopped attacking the administration’s use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Instead, they began to increasingly focus their attacks on the administration’s

¹³⁶³ Gallup Organization, *State of the Nation: 1976* (Williamstown, MA: The Roper Public Opinion Research Center, June 1976), 3-28, 65-71, 76-78, 80-84.

credibility. This framework for debate of the Vietnam War established in 1968—between supporters using the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify continuing the war and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—would remain the framework throughout the remainder of the war.

One enduring consequence of this change in opposition strategy was that, even after U.S. military involvement in Vietnam was over, this framework for debate would frequently reassert itself. Nearly every time that an administration contemplated a military intervention to combat what it perceived as Communist expansion, it would use the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify that intervention. And each time an administration used containment to argue for military intervention, opponents would begin to attack the administration’s credibility.

Losing the Vietnam War

When North Vietnam began its final spring offensive against South Vietnam in 1975, the new Ford administration contemplated military intervention to contain what it considered Communist expansion and save its South Vietnamese ally. The framework of public debate of foreign policy established during the latter half of the Vietnam War—between the use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify intervention and attacks on the administration’s credibility to block intervention—reasserted itself. In the end, opponents of this intervention won the day and President Ford was unable to intervene.

After the departure of U.S. ground forces from South Vietnam, the Nixon administration had continued to use American air power to support friendly forces fighting Communists across Southeast Asia. In June 1973, Congressional opponents of this continued military intervention tried to limit the President’s ability to use airpower in Cambodia and Laos. The President vetoed this measure—a veto upheld by the House—and used containment to justify his move. However,

ultimately, the Congress passed the Case-Church amendment, which prohibited the administration from intervening militarily in Southeast Asia to block Communist aggression.¹³⁶⁴

Some opponents of further U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia attacked the Nixon administration's use of containment to justify continued intervention. For instance, Senator Edward Kennedy wondered if the United States was really prepared to "rush back in as soon as the next domino starts to fall."¹³⁶⁵ However, other opponents attacked President Nixon's credibility. Reporter Tom Jarriel reminded Americans that the President had once described Cambodia as "the purest form of the Nixon Doctrine" of providing only aid and not military forces to help countries help themselves before he began demanding the power to intervene militarily with U.S. forces.¹³⁶⁶

Even before the beginning of the final North Vietnamese offensive in South Vietnam, the Ford administration used the ideology of containment to justify renewed aid to South Vietnam. Assistant Secretary of State Phillip Habib claimed that the United States had a responsibility to those South Vietnamese who had supported the United States during the war—a variation on the "bloodbath" argument. Habib said that the responsibility to provide aid was "the consequences of previous involvement in the area." He added: "This country should not abandon people who

¹³⁶⁴ Bob Clark, Tom Jarriel, Harry Reasoner, "Cambodia Bombing Halt / President Vetoes Bill," *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 27 June 1973, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=26491>.

¹³⁶⁵ NBC Evening News, "Cambodia / Offensive," *NBC Evening*, 4 April 1973, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 8 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=470068>.

¹³⁶⁶ Bob Clark, Tom Jarriel, Harry Reasoner, "Cambodia Bombing Halt / President Vetoes Bill," *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 27 June 1973, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=26491>.

are prepared to defend themselves and should supply the resources adequate to the task.”¹³⁶⁷ The Ford administration also used other containment arguments to justify continued assistance to South Vietnam. Habib cited the domino theory, adding that if aid was not provided, “the situation in South Vietnam will erode, and the situation in Cambodia will become increasingly dangerous.” Secretary of State Henry Kissinger cited the credibility of U.S. commitments, saying that failure to help South Vietnam would hurt the administration’s ability to engage in negotiations in the Middle East.¹³⁶⁸

As South Vietnamese forces fell back before the North Vietnamese onslaught, some opponents of renewed military intervention in South Vietnam attacked the administration’s use of containment to justify the war. Republican Senator John Tower of Texas, a strong supporter of the use of containment to justify military intervention in Vietnam during the war, said that statements by the Thai government that “suggested that Americans should depart” were indications “that they feel that the American presence is no longer valuable in Southeast Asia.” Democratic Senator Franck Church of Idaho said that U.S. “security never has been at stake in that part of the world.”¹³⁶⁹

But attacks on administration credibility were much more prevalent. Church said of repeated calls for aid to Southeast Asia: “New arguments have to be thought up every year to keep us there. And there comes a time when a grown up people should say ‘enough.’” Reporter

¹³⁶⁷ John Chancellor, Richard Valeriani, “South Vietnam Aid / Debate,” *NBC Evening News*, Thursday, 06 February 1975, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=481605>.

¹³⁶⁸ John Chancellor, Richard Valeriani, “South Vietnam Aid / Debate,” *NBC Evening News*, Thursday, 06 February 1975, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=481605>.

¹³⁶⁹ *NBC Evening News*, “South Vietnam / United States Military Aid / Senate, President,” *NBC Evening*, 18 March 1975, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 8 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=481794>.

Catherin Mackin of NBC News claimed that the administration's calls for support to South Vietnam were a political ploy. She said: "Some Democrats say President Ford is engaged [in] a word-war with Congress so that he will have someone to blame if Cambodia falls." She added: "These Democrats say that if President Ford really believed United States' security is involved in Cambodia, then he would ask Congress for troops and a lot more money."¹³⁷⁰

As the North Vietnamese invasion intensified, others in Congress also used charges of the administration's dishonesty to block efforts to support South Vietnam. Senator Henry Jackson charged that the administration had made "secret agreements" with Saigon. White House spokesman Ron Nessen was forced to concede that South Vietnam had been given assurances of a "vigorous reaction" from the United States in the event of "massive" North Vietnamese aggression. In response, Jackson launched an official Senate investigation into the matter to expose "secret maneuvering" by the administration that he claimed might damage American "credibility" abroad.¹³⁷¹

After the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, some former supporters of the war began to claim that the loss of South Vietnam had already resulted in the dire consequences predicted by the ideology of containment if the U.S. did not intervene militarily. In a report the day after the fall of Saigon, reporter John Chancellor said the domino theory was "much on the minds of leaders in the Philippines now." Jack Perkins added that Philippine leaders were telling their people, "The United States, whatever it may promise, is not to be depended upon in this part of

¹³⁷⁰ NBC Evening News, "South Vietnam / United States Military Aid / Senate, President," *NBC Evening*, 18 March 1975, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 8 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=481794>.

¹³⁷¹ Steve Bell, Sam Donaldson, Ted Koppel, Harry Reasoner, "US, Saigon / Secret Agreements," *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 09 April 1975, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=37054>.

the world anymore.” Perkins added that “Philippine officials [had begun] asking the next question: Then why should they allow the Americans to keep military bases here?” Perkins reported that “President Ceausescu of Rumania [visited] the Philippines, the first time a Communist chief of state had ever been allowed to come here.” Perkins also noted that both President Marcos and his wife were visiting China to establish diplomatic ties. The story included an interview with Philippine journalist Teodoro Valencia, who said, “Events have proven that America’s word cannot be trusted.... Especially if the American President makes the commitment, we don’t believe it.” As if to underscore that this was a proof of the domino theory, Perkins asked Valencia, “The United States today doesn’t have the influence that it did before the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia?” Valencia answered, “No.” John Chancellor added after the story that the United States was about to lose bases in Thailand as well.¹³⁷²

The fall of Cambodia and Laos to Communists was also used by advocates of U.S. military intervention as a proof of the domino theory. In a story about the impending withdrawal of troops from Thailand, Harry Reasoner said that the U.S.-Thai “friendship has been strained by uncertainty over the scheduled March 20[, 1976] withdrawal of U.S. military personnel.” Reasoner added that, after the fall of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, “Thailand is now the only country of the area friendly to the United States.” In a voiceover of Thai soldiers patrolling the jungle using U.S. equipment, Reasoner said: “There are those that feel that Thailand not only looks like Vietnam but may end that way, too.” Reasoner added: “North Vietnam, now without a war to worry about, has increased its supply of weapons and some say even manpower to the Thai guerilla movement.” Reasoner added in a voiceover of captured U.S. equipment

¹³⁷² NBC Evening News, “South Vietnam Fall / Diplomatic Aftereffects / Philippines,” *NBC Evening*, 1 May 1975, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, accessed 8 January 2013, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=482624>.

emblazoned with the flag of North Vietnam: “North Vietnam is the dominating power in Southeast Asia now. With an arsenal of captured American planes, weapons, and supplies, Hanoi’s potential influence is awesome.” Reasoner said: “That power, coupled with a nearly completed withdrawal of American forces from Thailand, is keeping the old domino theory alive.” Reasoner added that the Thai Prime Minister was “trying to reach a political understanding with his Communist neighbors.” Reasoner concluded: “Whether this domino indeed falls years after that seems, at this point, to depend on whether Hanoi wants it to.”¹³⁷³

CBS News launched a very effective counterattack to this contention by ABC News that the domino theory might play out in Thailand by attacking the domino theory itself as an example of previous administrations’ dishonesty. In a news story about the shifting alignment of Thailand, Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramroj said: “The domino theory is [a] purely American invention because, 10 years ago, [the] United States wanted very much, for reasons of its own, to be involved in the affairs of this part of the world.”¹³⁷⁴

Reagan and Central America

When Ronald Reagan took office, he advocated a series of military interventions to block or roll-back Communist expansion in Central America, and he used the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify these interventions. Opponents of military intervention quickly resumed the strategy of opposition to U.S. military intervention set during the latter half of the Vietnam War; they attacked the administration’s credibility to slow or block these interventions.

¹³⁷³ Ken Kashiwahara, Harry Reasoner, “Thailand,” *ABC Evening News*, Thursday, 12 February 1976, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=41690>.

Candidate Ronald Reagan made it clear, even before he was elected to the Presidency, that he was running to restore the Cold War consensus—the application of the ideology of military containment to foreign policy.¹³⁷⁵ Reagan said:

When we...cast our eyes abroad, we see...[a] sorry chapter on the record of the present administration.

As [a] Soviet combat brigade trains in Cuba, just 90 miles from our shores.

A Soviet army of invasion occupies Afghanistan, further threatening our vital interests in the Middle East.

America's defense strength is at its lowest ebb in a generation, while the Soviet Union is vastly outspending us in both strategic and conventional arms.

Our European allies, looking nervously at the growing menace from the East, turn to us for leadership and fail to find it...

Adversaries large and small test our will and seek to confound our resolve, but we are given weakness when we need strength; vacillation when the times demand firmness.¹³⁷⁶

Almost immediately upon taking office, President Ronald Reagan began to reassert military containment as a justification for U.S. intervention abroad. Reagan's first target was stopping the Communist insurgency in El Salvador. He promised to be aggressive in the use of diplomacy and military aid because the United States would "not just sit passively by and let this hemisphere be invaded by outside forces." Senator Howard Baker, a supporter of the Reagan administration, used the same arguments based on containment as the administration, saying:

¹³⁷⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Republican National Convention (July 17, 1980)," Miller Center, University of Virginia, 17 July 1980, accessed 14 September 2014, <http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-3406>.

¹³⁷⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Republican National Convention (July 17, 1980)," Miller Center, University of Virginia, 17 July 1980, accessed 14 September 2014, <http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-3406>.

“This administration is making a clear, unambiguous, straight-forward statement that Castro’s not going to have a free hand.”¹³⁷⁷

Some in the media also used the ideology of military containment to justify intervention. ABC’s Frank Reynolds said that El Salvador “has become, in fact, an East-West confrontation by proxy.” Barrie Dunsmore added: “Captured documents released last week pointed to direct Cuban and indirect Soviet involvement in the arming of El Salvador’s leftist insurgents.” Dunsmore then provided a voiceover of an animated map of Central America showing a red wave moving outward from Cuba to consume the Central America up to Mexico. He said: “The modern day domino theory is that Cuba currently has strong influence in Nicaragua. If El Salvador is subverted, Honduras and Guatemala will be next, making Mexico very vulnerable.” Dunsmore did add a note of caution on the administration’s decision to make a stand in El Salvador. He said: “Vietnam may not be an accurate comparison, but having made a stand, it’s hard to see where you stop, if the other side doesn’t.” He also added: “The El Salvadorian security forces are very repressive.”¹³⁷⁸

Some in the media and Congress attacked the administration’s use of containment to justify intervention in El Salvador. Charles Gibson said: “To some members of Congress, what the administration is considering in El Salvador has a familiar ring.” He added that El Salvador was “Vietnam in the making.” Gibson’s news story also showed testimony from former Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White saying that El Salvador faced more danger from

¹³⁷⁷ Sam Donaldson, Barrie Dunsmore, Charles Gibson, Frank Reynolds, Max Robinson, “El Salvador,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 03 March 1981, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=70851>.

¹³⁷⁸ Sam Donaldson, Barrie Dunsmore, Charles Gibson, Frank Reynolds, Max Robinson, “El Salvador,” *ABC Evening News*, Tuesday, 03 March 1981, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=70851>.

security forces of the Right than Leftists. White also insisted that Communists couldn't take over the country even if the United States didn't "send one piece of equipment." Gibson concluded that the administration's claim that "if El Salvador falls to the Communists, other countries may fall.... sounded like a new domino theory."¹³⁷⁹

The media also used leaders from the region to attack the administration's use of containment to justify military intervention in Central America. Reporter Charles Kraus travelled to Mexico City to interview Mexican Foreign Secretary Jorge Castaneda. Kraus began the story with yet another map of Central America and yet another animated depiction of the domino theory, with Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and the remainder of Central America through Mexico progressively turning red. The story cut to Castaneda, who said: "We don't have [to] fear for our security because our society we think is a strong society." Castaneda concluded: "We're not sure that the domino effect will take place in Central America." Kraus concluded this story by saying that Mexico "has excellent relations with Cuba and Nicaragua's new revolutionary government" and "does not share the Reagan administration's view of other Leftist regimes coming to power in Latin America." He added that Mexico did not "subscribe to the domino theory which now has some currency in Washington."¹³⁸⁰

However, the immediate response from Congress to President Reagan's reassertion of the ideology of containment to justify intervention in Central America—conditioned by the framework of debate established in the latter half of the Vietnam War—was to attack the administration's credibility. And the Congress' first target was CIA Director William Casey. At

¹³⁷⁹ Barrie Dunsmore, Charles Gibson, Frank Reynolds, "El Salvador," *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 25 February 1981, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=70271>.

¹³⁸⁰ Morton Dean, Charles Kraus, "El Salvador," *CBS Evening News*, Sunday, 08 March 1981, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=276383>.

first, the Congress attacked Casey personally, blasting him in a press conference over a *New York Times* story that revealed that a New Orleans judge had ruled that he had misled business investors in 1968. The Congress also attacked the credibility of Covert Operations Director Max Hugel after he resigned over personal financial issues. But attacks rapidly spread to questions over three covert operations the CIA was undertaking around the world: increased arms smuggling to mujahedeen in Afghanistan, a secret CIA monitoring station on the Chinese border with the Soviet Union built to track Soviet missile tests, and a secret force of U.S.-backed Cambodians searching for American prisoners of war in that country. Senators claimed that they had learned about all of these operations from press reports rather than from the CIA itself.¹³⁸¹

Despite these attacks on its credibility, the administration continued to use containment to justify intervention in Central America. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas told Congress in his testimony in February 1982:

The decisive battle for Central America is now underway in El Salvador. For if, after Nicaragua, El Salvador is captured by a violent minority, who in Central America will not live in fear? How long will it be before major U.S. strategic interests, the canal, the sea lanes, or oil supplies would be at risk?¹³⁸²

When Congressman Clarence Long suggested that this was the same logic that had plunged the United States into the Vietnam War, Enders responded: “This is very close to us. This is

¹³⁸¹ Sam Donaldson, Frank Reynolds, Max Robinson, John Scali, “CIA / Casey,” *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 15 July 1981, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=72626>.

¹³⁸² Dan Rather, Bob Simon, “El Salvador,” *CBS Evening News*, Monday, 01 February 1982, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=282030>.

happening right next to us. This is not Vietnam on the other side of the world. This is right next door to us.”¹³⁸³

Some in the media continued to attack the administration’s use of containment to justify intervention. In one story, Dan Rather repeatedly and incredulously warned the American people that “the domino theory in Central America was [being] resurrected.” In a voiceover of a map of Central America, Rather added: “Secretary of State Haig warned that a crisis... similar to that in El Salvador is now threatening neighboring Guatemala. And that, Haig said, could pose a very fundamental threat to Mexico.” Rather also quoted Haig as saying this process was “a clear, self-influencing sequence of events which could sweep all of Central America into a Cuba-dominated region.” Rather skeptically added that “Haig and other administration members have argued repeatedly that rebels in El Salvador are being directed by outsiders.”¹³⁸⁴

Despite these criticisms, the Reagan administration was making a compelling case that the Soviet Union, through Cuba, was supporting Communists in Central America. Haig revealed that a Nicaraguan was captured fighting with the El Salvador guerillas and said that they were directed by Cubans and the U.S.S.R. Haig also provided Congress with evidence that Soviet-built tanks, artillery, and anti-aircraft guns were being supplied to the rebels. Haig told a Congressional committee: “Two thousand Cuban military advisors are in Nicaragua. *Two thousand*. That’s almost one for every twenty soldiers” (emphasis is Haig’s). As a Senator tried to interrupt, Haig continued: “Four to five thousand Cuban technicians and teachers. Seventy

¹³⁸³ Dan Rather, Bob Simon, “El Salvador,” *CBS Evening News*, Monday, 01 February 1982, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=282030>.

¹³⁸⁴ Robert Pierpoint, Dan Rather, “El Salvador,” *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 04 March 1982, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=282965>.

Soviet military advisors. Thirty from North Korea, Bulgaria, GDR, and also the PLO.” Haig also detailed rebel atrocities against the Mosquito Indians in the region.¹³⁸⁵

By 1983, the Reagan administration was calling for the deployment of trainers to Central America to help the forces of friendly governments combat the growing Communist insurgency. And, again, the administration returned to the ideology of containment to justify this military intervention. Reagan said: “It isn’t nutmeg that’s at stake in the Caribbean and Central America; it is the United States’ national security.” He added that the Soviets wanted to Communize the region to cause U.S. forces to concentrate on America’s southern border, giving the Soviet Union a freer hand in the rest of the world. He concluded: “That is the reason the guerillas must be stopped in El Salvador.”¹³⁸⁶

Members of the Reagan administration went even further. Caspar Weinberger claimed the Soviets were trying to “attack” the United States in an “incremental way, from the south.” Weinberger echoed Reagan’s claim that this would “pressure” the United States to “pull ourselves out of Europe and out of Japan and Korea and establish some kind of a fortress America concept, which would serve the Soviet purposes very well globally.”¹³⁸⁷

Senator John Tower, who had disputed the application of the ideology of containment to the Ford administration’s proposal for renewed intervention in South Vietnam a decade earlier, supported containment of Communism in Central America. And, interestingly, he used the

¹³⁸⁵ Robert Pierpoint, Dan Rather, “El Salvador,” *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 04 March 1982, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=282965>.

¹³⁸⁶ Peter Collins, Sam Donaldson, Charles Gibson, Frank Reynolds, “El Salvador / United States Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Thursday, 10 March 1983, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=83041>.

¹³⁸⁷ Ann Compton, Sam Donaldson, “Kohl / US-USSR Disarmament Talks / El Salvador,” *ABC Evening News*, Sunday, 13 March 1983, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=83090>.

precedent of Southeast Asia not to warn of the dangers of intervention, but to warn of the dangers of *not* intervening. He said: “The domino theory could very well work in Central America.” He added: “After all, it did work in Southeast Asia. When South Vietnam fell, there went Kampuchea and Laos.”¹³⁸⁸ Senator John Warner also supported the administration: “Unless we support the President, in all likelihood, we’ll see a further spread of Communism in this very important part of the world.”¹³⁸⁹

Rather than attack the administration’s use of containment, the media began to follow the lead of Congressional opponents of intervention and attack the credibility of the administration’s claims about the situation in El Salvador. After Reagan claimed that some El Salvadoran soldiers were going into battle with only one magazine of ammo, Anne Garrels went to El Salvador and interviewed El Salvadoran soldiers to show that this was a lie or, at least, an exaggeration.¹³⁹⁰

Congress also continued to attack the administration’s credibility on El Salvador. In February 1983, two U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers were wounded while accompanying El Salvadoran government forces on a military operation—an activity the administration had said U.S. military trainers would not undertake. The administration compounded the problem when it first said the soldiers were injured in a training flight before admitting it had been a “combat situation.” Three Green Berets were expelled from the country over the matter, but the damage

¹³⁸⁸ Ann Compton, Sam Donaldson, “Kohl / US-USSR Disarmament Talks / El Salvador,” *ABC Evening News*, Sunday, 13 March 1983, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=83090>.

¹³⁸⁹ Peter Collins, Sam Donaldson, Charles Gibson, Frank Reynolds, “El Salvador / United States Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Thursday, 10 March 1983, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=83041>.

¹³⁹⁰ Anne Garrels, Charles Gibson, Peter Jennings, “Central America / United States Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Thursday, 10 May 1984, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=89855>.

was done. Representative Michael Barnes, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Latin America said: “Once again we have a situation where the administration puts out one line, which just wasn’t credible from the beginning.” He added: “You didn’t have to be a military expert to know you don’t train people 15 kilometers from where the war is going on.” Barnes concluded: “Yet again the administration...puts out one story and two days later has to say well sorry about that, that wasn’t true, now here’s the facts.” Representative Jim Leach added that the Green Berets expelled from the country were just “scapegoats” for the administration’s misconduct.¹³⁹¹

The following year, covert operations in Central America provided another opportunity for Congress to attack the administration’s credibility. Vice Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Democratic Senator Pat Moynihan resigned from his position in protest over the Reagan administration’s mining of Nicaraguan harbors to block the supply of Soviet arms to that country from Cuba. Moynihan insisted angrily: “They did not brief us.” Senator Patrick Leahy described this as part of an historical pattern of substituting covert activity for foreign policy. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger unintentionally magnified the scale of this event when—in order to support the administration’s calls for funds to support El Salvador—he said that U.S. troops would eventually have to be sent to the region if Congress didn’t approve funds. He said on *This Week*: “In two years or less, we’re going to arrive at precisely this point where we will have to decide whether the only way...we can save this [is] by American forces.” The administration could only respond by saying it was no longer mining the harbors.¹³⁹²

¹³⁹¹ Bill Lynch, Lesley Stahl, “El Salvador,” *CBS Evening News*, Saturday, 05 February 1983, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=288889>.

¹³⁹² Sam Donaldson, Mike von Fremd, John Quinones, “Central American / Moynihan Resignation,” *ABC Evening News*, 15 April 1984, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=89439>.

This attack on the administration's credibility was quickly followed by another attack on CIA Director William Casey's credibility over additional covert operations against Nicaragua that were not disclosed to Congress; in essence, Casey was accused of lying by omission of important facts (that he was legally required to provide). In addition to not revealing the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, the CIA allegedly also attacked Nicaragua's oil storage facilities without first telling Congress. Reporter Robert Schakne said that, in violation of a 1980 law, the CIA had provided "no advance notification of either the oil storage raids or the mining and no detailed briefing about the mining for the Senate until this month." Schakne said: "Not since the mid-1970s has relations between the CIA and the Congress been so poisonous" noting that one Republican Senator on the Intelligence Committee gave Casey a "two on a scale of ten in matters of trust" while a Democratic Senate staffer said that "Casey's attitude toward Congress adds up to criminal casualness." Representative Norman Mineta said in an interview in this story that another Republican Senator described Casey "as a person who, if your coat was on fire, wouldn't tell you unless you ask him." Senator David Durenberger added: "You have to be able to say.... We trust that you've told us everything there is to know on which we can base our judgment. [If] we don't have that trust, then the whole system collapses."¹³⁹³

By 1985, President Reagan was being even more explicit in warning of the dangers of failing to contain Communism in Central America. He told a news conference that, if Congress failed to act, "We face the risk that a hundred million people from Panama to our open southern border could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes." However, appealing less to the

¹³⁹³ Dan Rather, Robert Schakne, "Nicaragua / World Court / Casey Controversy," *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 25 April 1984, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=296597>.

strategic implications than to pocketbook issues, he added that such an outcome would “threaten the United States with violence, economic chaos, and a human tidal wave of refugees.”¹³⁹⁴

The following year, the debate over Central America shifted to support for Contra rebels fighting inside Nicaragua against the Communist regime. Reagan warned Congress that defeat of the measure to provide aid to the Contras could “deliver Nicaragua permanently to the Communist bloc. Defeat for the Contras would mean a second Cuba on the mainland of North America.” Secretary of State George Shultz added that, without help to the “democratic opposition” in Nicaragua, “hope for democracy in Nicaragua is doomed and progress elsewhere in Central America could be undone.”¹³⁹⁵

In a variation on the lessons of Munich a few days later, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger warned in Senate testimony that, if aid was not provided, U.S. troops might eventually be needed in Central America. He added that these funds were required “to prevent a war.”¹³⁹⁶ Reagan made a similar claim a few days later, saying that those opposing aid were “courting disaster and history will hold them accountable.” He added: “If we don’t want to see the map of Central America covered in a sea of red, eventually lapping at our own borders, we must act, now.”¹³⁹⁷ In a radio address a few days later, Reagan warned of the “growing danger

¹³⁹⁴ David Martin, Dan Rather, Peter King, “Nicaragua / United States Policy,” *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 04 April 1985, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=303355>.

¹³⁹⁵ Bill Plante, Dan Rather, “Nicaragua / United States Intervention,” *CBS Evening News*, Monday, 03 March 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=308975>.

¹³⁹⁶ Sam Donaldson, Charles Gibson, Peter Jennings, “Nicaragua / United States Rebel Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Wednesday, 05 March 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=101783>.

¹³⁹⁷ Dan Rather, “Nicaragua / United States Rebel Aid,” *CBS Evening News*, Wednesday, 05 March 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=309047>.

from the Soviets, East Germans, Bulgarians, North Koreans, Cubans, and PLO camped on our doorstep.”¹³⁹⁸ In a press conference a few days after this address, Reagan appeared with a table full of Soviet arms he claimed were captures from El Salvadoran guerillas and supplied by Nicaragua. He said that, if the United States didn’t act, “Americans will in the not-too-distant future, look to the South and see a string of anti-American Communist dictatorships. It will be an irreparable disaster.”¹³⁹⁹

In March 1986, CBS News launched a coordinated attack against the President’s policies in Central America, implying that his use of containment to justify intervention was itself dishonest. In a *CBS Evening News* story by Phil Jones, a series of Congressmen and experts attacked the President. House Speaker Tip O’Neill accused the President of dishonesty, saying that, while he claimed he did not, Reagan actually wanted to send U.S. troops to Nicaragua. The story then cut to video of the President saying: “If we don’t want to see the map of Central America covered in a sea of red, eventually lapping at our own borders, we must act now.” Reporter Phil Jones responded by calling this an “alleged crisis” and then cut to William Schneider of the American Enterprise Institute claiming that the President was trying to scare Americans, saying “that if we don’t stop the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, they’ll end up in San Diego or Texas.” He added: “Americans aren’t convinced of that.” Senator Mark Hatfield claimed that the President was hiding the true cost of his intervention, saying: “It’s a hundred

¹³⁹⁸ Sheilah Kast, Kathleen Sullivan, “Nicaragua / United States Military Aid,” *ABC Evening News*, Saturday, 08 March 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=101847>.

¹³⁹⁹ Dan Rather, Lesley Stahl, “Nicaragua / United States Military Aid,” *CBS Evening News*, Thursday, 13 March 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=308720>.

million this year. What's going to be the figure next year?" Hatfield asked: "Where is the light at the end of the tunnel?"¹⁴⁰⁰

In the end, the Reagan administration won this fight for funding to support limited intervention in Central America. CBS News attributed this victory not to the strength of the administration's arguments—its use of containment to justify intervention in Central America—but to arm-twisting and backdoor political wrangling. CBS reporter Bob Schieffer said: "When the president described what might happen in Nicaragua this week if Congress turned down the aid, he did it in the harshest terms." Reagan was shown giving a speech from the Oval Office in which he said: "We will have to confront the reality of a Soviet military beachhead within our defense perimeters about 500 miles from Mexico." However, the rest of the story was about how the President had won the victory not through the strength of this argument, but because of "heavy lobbying" of Congress behind closed doors. A series of experts, including Norman Ornstein from the American Enterprise Institute, House Speaker Tip O'Neill, and Representative Jim Leach also described the heavy lobbying effort by the White House.¹⁴⁰¹

The framework for public debate of the Vietnam War established in 1968—between supporters using the ideology of military containment of Communism to justify continuing the war and dissenters attacking the administration's credibility—would remain the framework for debate throughout the end of the war. This dramatic change in the opposition's strategy—from

¹⁴⁰⁰ Phil Jones, Dan Rather, "Nicaragua / United States Military Aid," *CBS Evening News*, Friday, 14 March 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=308744>.

¹⁴⁰¹ Mike O'Connor, Bob Schieffer, "Nicaragua / Contra Aid," *CBS Evening News*, Saturday, 28 June 1986, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, TN, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=310571>.

attacking the administration's use of military containment to attacking its credibility—had two enduring consequences that extended beyond the war.

The first and most important consequence of this new framework for foreign policy debate was that, while attacks on the administration's credibility succeeded in ending the Vietnam War, they did nothing to dismantle the Cold War consensus that was still held by a majority of Americans. It is probable that this change in opposition strategy is the reason that the Cold War consensus survived well beyond the end of the Vietnam War.

The second consequence of the change of opposition strategy in late 1968, from attacking the administration's use of the ideology of military containment of Communism to attacking the administration's credibility, was that the framework for debate from the latter half of the Vietnam war—between supporters using the ideology of military containment to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and opponents attacking the administration's credibility—would frequently recur as the framework for debate of other proposed military interventions after the Vietnam War. When North Vietnam began its final offensive against South Vietnam in 1975, the new Ford administration contemplated military intervention to contain this perceived Communist expansion. The framework of public debate of military intervention established during the latter half of the Vietnam War—between the use of containment to justify intervention and attacks on the administration's credibility to block intervention—reasserted itself. In the end, opponents of intervention prevailed and the Ford administration was unable to intervene. When Ronald Reagan took office, he advocated a series of military interventions to block or roll back Communist expansion in Central America, and used the ideology of containment to justify these interventions. Opponents of military intervention once more focused their attacks on the administration's credibility to block or slow these interventions.

Conclusion

The questions that have preoccupied historians for the past forty years about the events that initiated America's direct military intervention in the Vietnam War—the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—are compelling. Did the attacks on 4 August 1964 against the *U.S.S. Maddox* and *Tuner Joy* actually happen? Probably not, though at the time the administration almost certainly believed they had.¹⁴⁰² Were these destroyers involved in clearly provocative activities in what North Vietnam considered its territorial waters and in close proximity to offensive operations conducted by the South Vietnamese Navy with U.S. assistance? Absolutely, yes. Did the President and the administration fully anticipate that there would be further escalations at the same time that they were assuring Members of Congress that they would not use the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to escalate the war? Yes. But these questions, in many ways, miss the larger point.

What was the President's and the administration's intent in seeking the Tonkin Gulf Resolution? Lyndon Johnson's historical frame of reference as he embarked on the Vietnam War was the Korean War, a war which Johnson believed unraveled because President Truman had failed to obtain Congressional endorsement.¹⁴⁰³ From the way President Johnson used it, it seems clear that he wanted the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an insurance policy against Congressional dissent. For Johnson, the obstacle to passage of such a resolution was that several of the key leaders in the Congress were privately skeptical of Johnson's contention that military intervention in Southeast Asia was required to contain Communism. For Johnson, the Gulf of Tonkin incident simply provided the political impetus to overcome Congressional reluctance and gain passage of his Resolution. For the Johnson administration, the Resolution was an end in

¹⁴⁰² Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, xi-xii, xiv, 203, 240, 225, 254-255.

¹⁴⁰³ Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 226-227.

and of itself;¹⁴⁰⁴ it didn't matter how he got the Resolution as long as he got this vital piece of paper. In the end he deceived Congress as to the facts of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and as to his true intentions for the Resolution. Once he had his insurance policy, Johnson acted as if it no longer mattered what Congress thought of his actions in Vietnam. Many leaders in Congress privately urged him not to escalate the war on the eve of his 28 July 1965 announcement of the deployment of large numbers of troops to Vietnam;¹⁴⁰⁵ Johnson responded in a letter back to the Members of Congress with a point-by-point refutation of their arguments and then announced the troop deployments anyway.¹⁴⁰⁶

Why did Congress pass such a broad-reaching resolution? Of course, the President had assured them that he wanted no wider war and would not use the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to escalate the war. But why give the President an expression of support for something he claimed he did not intend to do? For Congress, the Resolution was itself an escalation designed to

¹⁴⁰⁴ [Bromely Smith], "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia. Cabinet Room, June 10, 1964, 5:30 PM -- Southeast Asia (without the President)," 10 June 1964, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, folder Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX); Vietnam Task Force, "Chronology," Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Part IV. C.] Evolution of the War, Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968. Volume II: A, Military Pressures Against NVN, February-June 1964, xx-xxvii, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed 11 October 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/>; Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview I, 8 July 1971, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX), 13-15.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Mike Mansfield, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson, "SUBJECT: Meeting on Viet Nam," 27 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

¹⁴⁰⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, letter to Senator Mike Mansfield with attached responses to Senator Mansfield's '18 points,' 28 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX); Robert S. McNamara, letter to Lyndon B. Johnson with responses to Senator Mike Mansfield's '18 points,' 28 July 1965, box 71 [1 of 2], folder ND 19-CO 312 VIETNAM (Situation In) (1964-1965) [3 OF 4], Central File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, TX).

communicate to the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam that the United States was willing to intervene militarily to prevent the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. To Congress, this Resolution was very much in the mold of the Formosa Resolution or the Middle East Resolution—resolutions that warned the United States’ Cold War adversaries that the United States would intervene militarily to protect the sovereignty of specific countries and regions around the world. Most members of Congress believed that such resolutions had, in the past, actually prevented wars.¹⁴⁰⁷ Congress considered the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to be such an instrument of containment—not a Congressional endorsement of Johnson’s escalation of the war. In this context, the Gulf of Tonkin incident (as it was portrayed to Congress by the administration) was simply further evidence of North Vietnamese aggression, evidence that the United States’ measures to that point had been insufficient to restrain North Vietnamese ambitions and that a sterner measure—the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—might finally communicate to the Communists that America would stand by South Vietnam.

How did the American people perceive the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution? By August 1964, President Johnson and his administration had been telling the American people for over half a year that Southeast Asia was threatened by Communist aggression much as the world had been threatened by aggression from the Axis powers before World War II. In this context, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was probably perceived as a proof of the lessons of Munich, that aggression unanswered breeds more aggression. To the extent that any American was paying attention to Vietnam in late summer 1964, the United States’ retaliatory air strikes and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were examples of the United States

¹⁴⁰⁷ Ziemke, “Senator Richard B. Russell...,” 30-71.

standing up to aggression rather than bowing to it as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain supposedly had at Munich over two decades earlier.

As the President began to increasingly commit U.S. military force to direct action in the Vietnam War, the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution receded from the public debate. Instead, the Johnson administration incessantly repeated that the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia required U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam. The overwhelming majority opponents of the war attacked the application of the ideology of containment to the Vietnam War, positing a myriad of reasons that the conflict did not fit the Cold War model of containment. Within this broader antiwar movement, however, there was a core of dissenters that were not just trying to end the Vietnam War. They were trying to institute a revolution in foreign policy—trying to dismantle the Cold War consensus and move the entire framework of U.S. foreign policy beyond the ideology of containment. Some of these revolutionaries, especially in men in the Congress such as J. William Fulbright, criticized both the suitability of the Vietnam War to the containment paradigm and the ideology of containment itself. Other revolutionaries, especially radical protesters, attacked the ideology of containment and its corrupting effect both on foreign and domestic policy.

This foreign policy revolution failed because the majority of Americans continued to believe in the Cold War consensus. As this dissertation has shown, most in the American public—and even a great number in the media and the foreign policymaking elite in and out of government—consistently rejected those who attacked the ideology of containment or its application to Vietnam and, when asked directly in polls throughout the Vietnam War, consistently expressed support for many of the precepts of the Cold War consensus. This was, in fact, the reason for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s decision to change its strategy—

from attacking the administration's use of the ideology of military containment to justify the war to attacking the administration's credibility—in 1968.

No matter how hard opponents argued to the contrary, the administration's contention that the Vietnam War was a war of Communists aggression against South Vietnam was very compelling to most Americans. First, the evidence at least *appeared* to match the ideology of military containment. North Vietnam *was* getting material aid from Communist China and the Soviet Union. The North Vietnamese *were* sending material aid to South Vietnam. And North Vietnamese troops *were* fighting in South Vietnam against U.S. and South Vietnamese troops. To most Americans, it certainly *looked* like a war of Communist aggression against South Vietnam. Even more fundamentally, however, the use of containment to justify military intervention in Vietnam spoke to meta-principles held by the vast majority of Americans: Communists were aggressive, they sought world domination, and the loss of any country by the free world was a gain for the Communist world. Most Americans had, to varying degrees, internalized these basic precepts of containment—the bulwark of the Cold War consensus—and rejected those who argued against them.

While these foreign policy revolutionaries failed to bring about their revolution, they still had an impact on the future of American in foreign affairs. The revolutionaries within the Congressional antiwar bloc, while unable to move America's foreign policy beyond the ideology of containment, were able to put new limits on Presidential war-making power: the repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Congressional resolutions progressively limiting the President's ability to intervene militarily in Southeast Asia, and most notably the 1973 War Powers Act. Moreover, while most Americans continued to hold to the Cold War consensus, the Cold War consensus among foreign policy leaders was broken, with some believing some or all of the precepts of

military containment and others having altogether abandoned this ideology. Many of the foreign policy revolutionaries—especially in the Congress and the media—remained in the public foreign policy debate long after the Vietnam War and continued to oppose U.S. military intervention in other conflicts through the end of the Cold War and beyond.

On the other hand, the radicals of the foreign policy revolution had less of an impact after the failure of their revolution in 1968. Radical protesters were dispirited by the failure of their foreign policy revolution. Some continued to demonstrate against the war until its end. Some faded into the broader counterculture. Others slipped into ever more radical militancy, with some embracing the Communism that their society opposed¹⁴⁰⁸ and a tiny minority actually becoming Communist insurgents against their own countrymen.¹⁴⁰⁹

In late 1967 and early 1968, once it was clear that they would not be able to reshape the entire American foreign policy paradigm, opponents of the war changed their strategy with the narrower goal of ending the Vietnam War. Instead of continuing to assail the application of containment to the war in Vietnam or the ideology of containment itself, opponents of the war began attacking the administration's credibility on the war. It was then that the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution suddenly reemerged as a central issue to the debate over Vietnam.

For the Johnson administration, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution remained their insurance policy against Congressional dissent. Whatever Members of Congress might say, all but two of

¹⁴⁰⁸ James Weinstein, "Weatherman: A Lot Of Thunder But A Short Reign," *Socialist Revolution*, January-February 1970, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 223.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Karin Asbley, Bill Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, John Jacobs, Jeff Jones, Gerry Long, Home Machtinger, Jim Mellen, Terry Robbins, Mark Rudd and Steve Tappis, "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows," *New Left Notes*, 18 June 1969, reprinted in *Weatherman* ed. by Harold Jacobs, (San Francisco: Ramparts, 1970), 34.

them had voted for the Resolution. And, whatever Congressional dissenters might claim the President told them before its passage, the text of the Resolution endorsed the President's decision to take whatever measures he chose to stop Communist aggression against South Vietnam. However, there was one threat to what would otherwise be an ironclad shield against Congressional dissent: the Gulf of Tonkin incident—the supposed attacks on the *U.S.S Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on 4 August 1964—had not happened. While Johnson would repeatedly say after he left office that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution should have been called the Fulbright Resolution (because Fulbright was so instrumental in its passage), it was not. It was called the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and questions about the Gulf of Tonkin incident would hang from it like a millstone.

For Congressional dissenters, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was the chink in the otherwise impenetrable armor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which the administration and its supporters had begun to ever more forcefully invoke as dissent grew in Congress beginning in 1968. It was also compelling evidence of President Johnson's dishonesty in leading the United States into war in Vietnam. By the end of spring 1968, after Fulbright's hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident had taken full effect with the American public the President's credibility with the American people was irreparably damaged. In the face of a bitter and desperate primary battle, Johnson withdrew from the Presidential race

For the American public, revelations about the Gulf of Tonkin incident were just more dramatic evidence that the President had been lying to them, a conclusion that most Americans had already reached by 1968. In fact, by late 1967, opponents of the war had already begun a steady drumbeat of attacks on the administration's credibility—including questions about the administration's credibility on civilian casualties caused by bombing North Vietnam and whether

the President truly wanted negotiations to end the war. Then, on the eve of hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the Tet Offensive began and called into question the credibility of the administration's rosy predictions for the war from the second half of 1967. In this context, revelations that the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the incident that had initiated the Americanization of the war, probably hadn't happened were simply the final straw. The American people lost confidence in the Johnson administration.

While the majority of Americans had lost faith in President Johnson and most Americans believed it had been a mistake to send U.S. troops to Vietnam, they were not ready to lose the war. The American public rejected those candidates who ran calling for a compromise peace that would sacrifice the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia. They also rejected President Johnson's chosen successor, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, due to questions about his own credibility. Instead, by a narrow margin, Americans turned to Republican challenger Richard Nixon, who promised to see the war to an "honorable end" (which most Americans understood to be a peace that preserved the goal of containing Communism in Southeast Asia) and joined most Americans in decrying radical protesters and Congressional dissenters who attacked the ideology of containment. Nixon had successfully identified himself with the Cold War consensus that most Americans still embraced in late 1968.

Still, in 1968 this new opposition strategy—attacking the administration's credibility rather than attacking its use of containment to justify the war—had brought down a President and stopped the escalation of the war. The dramatic effectiveness of this strategy permanently altered the debate over the Vietnam War. Most opponents would focus their attacks on the administration's credibility for the remainder of the war.

When Nixon took office, opponents of the war immediately resumed their new strategy of opposition: attacking his credibility. The course of the war—the Cambodian Incursion, the Laos Incursion, the trial over the My Lai massacre, the VVAW protests, and the Pentagon Papers—also dealt blows to Nixon’s credibility. To “purchase” credibility with the American people, President Nixon used troop withdrawals and progress in negotiations to prove he was making good on his commitment to end the war. But Nixon could not use this strategy to prolong the war indefinitely; there were only so many U.S. troops in Vietnam that he could withdraw if he was going to maintain sufficient military strength in Vietnam to compel the North Vietnamese to negotiate on terms favorable to his goal of containing Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. The crisis of credibility he endured in 1971—particularly the VVAW protests—forced him to accelerate troop withdrawals and in the end, he ran out of troops before he was able to compel North Vietnam to accept a favorable settlement. The final settlement left North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, setting the stage for that country’s destruction.

The change of strategy among opponents of the war in 1968—from attacking the administration’s use of containment to justify the war to attacking the administration’s credibility—had two important and lasting effects on American foreign policy. First, this framework for foreign policy debate—between supporters using containment to justify U.S. military interventions around the world and opponents attacking the administration’s credibility—would repeat itself in many of the foreign policy debates throughout the remainder of the war. On many occasions, when an intervention was contemplated by an administration, this framework for debate reasserted itself.

However, second and most importantly, the majority of the American public continued to believe the precepts of the Cold War consensus on military containment while some members of the foreign policy elite were abandoning that consensus.

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