

# DOVES AMONG HAWKS: REPUBLICAN OPPOSITION TO THE VIETNAM WAR, 1964–1968

*by Andrew L. Johns*

Most historians of the Vietnam conflict have extrapolated the Republican commitment to anticommunism generally and in Southeast Asia specifically into full-scale support for the war within the party. Yet the evidence demonstrates that a number of influential Republicans—including John Sherman Cooper and George Aiken—vocally opposed the Johnson administration's Vietnam policies and advocated negotiations and de-escalation as early as 1964. Unfortunately, their dissent has been almost totally neglected by the same historians who laud the antiwar efforts of prominent Democratic critics of the conflict. This article seeks to redress this oversight, examining Republican opposition to the war and contrasting the views of GOP doves with their hawkish counterparts.

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When historians discuss the Republican Party during the 1960s, they do so in broad generalizations and usually only in the context of a discussion of the 1964 or 1968 presidential elections. Indeed, it would be very easy to assume from the existing literature that aside from Richard Nixon and Barry Goldwater, the GOP took the decade off. Nowhere is this truer than in foreign affairs, where both Kennedy and Johnson receive either praise (rarely) or blame (more frequently) for the policies of their respective administrations. However, the Republicans were neither apathetic nor passive in foreign affairs during their years as an absolute minority party in government. Opposition to communism remained a core principle of Republican foreign policy during the 1960s and resulted in widespread support within the party for an American role in Vietnam, especially in the early years of the commitment. As Robert Rutland has argued, Republicans in Congress and at the grassroots level supported the Vietnam War as part of a global assault on communism, fearing that dissent during the fighting might be branded as disloyal or unpatriotic.<sup>1</sup>

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Numerous historians of the Vietnam conflict have extrapolated the Republican commitment to anticommunism generally and in Vietnam specifically into full-scale support for the war within the party. To a certain extent, this portrayal is accurate. Indeed, the depth of GOP support of the war—especially when contrasted with the lack of Democratic support for its own president's policies—should make us reconsider Larry Berman's characterization of Vietnam as "Lyndon Johnson's War."<sup>2</sup> To be sure, several of the most prominent and outspoken members of the Republican Party—most notably Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen and former president Dwight Eisenhower—supported the American war effort in Vietnam into 1969, and influential Republicans such as Nixon, Goldwater, and House minority leader Gerald Ford consistently urged the Johnson administration to prosecute the war more aggressively.

Yet, to argue that the GOP stood fully behind the war is as patently incorrect as is the assertion that Vietnam was the "Democrats' war," especially when one considers the influential Republican lawmakers who questioned the need for a full-scale commitment to South Vietnam. Most were moderate-to-liberal Republicans when "liberal Republican" was not the oxymoron that it has become today. In the Senate, this group eventually included Clifford Case, George Aiken, Mark Hatfield, Jacob Javits, Thruston Morton, and John Sherman Cooper. Prominent governors Nelson Rockefeller and George Romney also turned from support of the American commitment to call for a negotiated end to the fighting. While never the dominant force on Vietnam within the party, these members of Congress, governors, and other party leaders nevertheless played an important part in the growing Republican dissatisfaction with the war in the second half of the 1960s, and several would be key players in the denouement of the conflict.

These GOP doves have been almost totally neglected by the same historians who laud the antiwar efforts of Frank Church, Ernest Gruening, and J. William Fulbright. Given the lack of attention given to the party as a whole during Vietnam specifically and the 1960s generally, however, perhaps we should not be so astonished.<sup>3</sup> Yet to ignore the GOP during the Vietnam War results in, to borrow a phrase, the sound of one hand clapping in American political and diplomatic history. Republicans on both sides of the war issue made substantial contributions to the debate on the war and carried significant influence both among their peers and with the administration. The evidence clearly demonstrates that the Republican Party, as much as the Democratic

Party, was split over the Vietnam War. While there was a sizable contingent of hawks within the party, opponents of the war included some of the most respected members of the party. Interestingly, a large percentage of the Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the 1960s—including Aiken, Case, and Cooper—advocated negotiations and de-escalation. Whether their stands resulted more from personal proclivities or access to detailed information about the war's progress remains unclear. The bottom line, however, is this: Republican lawmakers and governors felt just as strongly about ending the American involvement in Vietnam as did their Democratic counterparts who have received so much praise for their courageous stands against the administration's policies during the war. This article will begin to redress this oversight by focusing on several of these doves among hawks in the Republican Party, examining how and why they opposed the war, and contrasting their views with those of the GOP supporters of the conflict.

By 1964, the situation in South Vietnam had deteriorated badly and placed the new Johnson administration in a difficult position. Indeed, as the compilers of the *Pentagon Papers* asserted, the situation "was deteriorating so rapidly that the dimensions and kinds of effort so far invested could not hope to reverse the trend."<sup>4</sup> While the administration struggled with revolving-door regimes in Saigon, a worsening military situation, and the possibility of a significant increase in the American commitment of men, material, and money, voices of dissent emerged from across the political spectrum. For Johnson, who thrived on consensus, nothing could have made the problematic conditions he faced any worse. To exacerbate the situation further, opposition to the nation's involvement in Vietnam had grown from a few fringe politicians to include many of the most well respected legislators in the country.

While the two best-known opponents to America's involvement in Vietnam during 1964 are Senators Ernest Gruening (D-AK) and Wayne Morse (D-OR), Senator John Sherman Cooper (R-KY) stands as one of the most important—and overlooked—dissenters on the Vietnam War.<sup>5</sup> A former U.S. Ambassador to India whose intelligence and persuasiveness made him extremely effective behind closed doors on Capitol Hill despite his poor oratorical style and low national profile, Cooper expressed doubts about the wisdom of American involvement in Southeast Asia from the beginning of the conflict and would remain one of the leading voices against the war for a decade. Cooper had warned Kennedy against a large-scale U.S. military intervention, had called on the

administration to seek a negotiated settlement, and constantly lobbied his former Senate colleague, Lyndon Johnson, to extricate the United States from the burgeoning quagmire in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

In April 1964, Cooper urged the Johnson administration to make a serious attempt at negotiation. While he realized that the prospects for a satisfactory agreement were not very high, the military outlook was worse and Cooper foresaw significant problems if the United States continued on its present course. In May, after Johnson asked Congress for \$125 million in additional aid for Saigon, Cooper said, "If the Vietnamese will not fight, I personally cannot see how we can hold our position in that country. Considering our obligations, we should give them a chance, but if they will not fight, I cannot see how we can bear this burden of men, money, and assistance in Southeast Asia." If the situation continued to deteriorate, he continued, the United States should pursue a reconvened Geneva conference.<sup>7</sup> His pleas seemed to fall on deaf ears in the White House. Even as Cooper was advocating negotiations, Johnson and his advisers secretly prepared for a significant increase in the American commitment to South Vietnam.

Nevertheless, Johnson made it clear that nothing would or should be done prior to the November elections. Domestic priorities claimed the lion's share of the president's personal and institutional resources during the first half of 1964, as Johnson sought to maximize his popularity, escape from the shadow of Camelot and win his own mandate, achieve legislative success, and avoid or postpone potentially divisive decisions on Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> Johnson let it be known to his aides that he wanted to avoid any sort of public debate or crisis on Vietnam until after the election. For the president, Vietnam was the absolute last thing he wanted to deal with and he "did everything to convey to his associates that their principal job in foreign affairs was to keep things on the back burner" in order to avoid "headlines about some accident."<sup>9</sup> The best way to avoid problems in the campaign and deny the Republicans a gold-plated issue was to ignore Vietnam as long as possible.

Johnson's problems were solved temporarily with the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August 1964. With an (allegedly) explicit attack on an American naval vessel, the president was able to go to Congress and ask for a joint resolution authorizing him to retaliate and support American forces in the region. Because of the obvious pretext for the request, Johnson could continue to portray himself as a moderate on the conflict and further marginalize the presumptive Republican nominee, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, as a potentially dangerous

hawk. The attacks resulted in an outpouring of patriotism (and, truthfully, expediency in an election year where nearly 450 members of Congress were running for reelection) which ensured the rapid passage of the measure and provided Johnson with bipartisan support and domestic political protection.<sup>10</sup>

The results of the congressional vote on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution are as familiar to historians as the lineup of the Big Red Machine is to baseball fans. Yet what is not so mundane is that there were nearly three dissenting votes, and numerous other members of Congress expressed serious reservations about the proposed resolution. Representative Eugene Siler (R-KY) announced that he was "paired" against the resolution, which meant in effect that if he had been present for the vote, he would have voted against the measure. In a statement released by his office, Siler stated that he opposed the resolution as unnecessary and contended that the United States had no business fighting in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> This strong antiwar stance was not new for the soon-to-be-retiring Kentucky congressman. Indeed, on June 8, 1964, Siler had announced his candidacy for president on the floor of the House. His unique platform was very simple: "I am running with the understanding that I will resign after 24 hours in the White House ... What I propose to do in my 1 day as President is to call home our 15,000 troops in South Vietnam and cancel our part of that ill-fated, unnecessary, and un-American campaign in Southeast Asia."<sup>12</sup> Siler may have been a fringe political figure in 1964, but his opposition to the war at this early stage should be recognized along with that of Gruening, Morse, and Cooper.

Moreover, concern over the scope and potential meaning of the resolution was much greater than the vote would indicate. Indeed, particularly in the Senate, there were significant reservations and questions about the exact meaning of the resolution. Cooper stated that Johnson "has with respect to our action in South Vietnam, a certain maneuverability, and avenues of negotiation which should be assiduously used, however they may be received." Yet he questioned the importance of Southeast Asia to American interests, and the realistic limitations of American military power when deployed on a global scale: "We are committed in Europe and believe our chief interest is in the Western Hemisphere and Europe. In the Pacific, we are committed to the defense of Formosa, Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. I do not know how widely we can spread our resources and our men in the military forces."<sup>13</sup>

In an exchange with J. William Fulbright (D-AR), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who had accepted the responsibility from the White House to assure overwhelming passage of the resolution in the Senate, Cooper asked about the powers that the resolution granted the president:

Cooper: Are we now giving the President advance authority to take whatever action he may deem necessary respecting South Vietnam and its defense, or with respect to the defense of any other country included in the [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] treaty?

Fulbright: I think that is correct.

Cooper: 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?

Fulbright: That is the way I would interpret it.<sup>14</sup>

Despite his prescient interrogation of Fulbright, Cooper never seriously considered voting against the resolution. While he shared the concerns of the more vocal opponents of the war, he did not share their willingness to break openly with the administration when American armed forces were in harm's way. Cooper was neither a maverick nor a fringe political figure; he was an independent thinker with serious doubts about America's role in Southeast Asia.

His vote on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution notwithstanding, Cooper remained steadfast in his opposition to increased involvement in Vietnam in the months leading up to Johnson's decision to Americanize the war. In January 1965, while most Republicans were calling for a policy of preserving an independent South Vietnam at virtually any cost, Cooper and several prominent Democrats called for a reevaluation of American policy. As he told reporters, "If these people in South Vietnam will not stand and fight, I don't see how we can stay there."<sup>15</sup> The administration—ever concerned with dissent in foreign policy, especially on Vietnam—worrying about Cooper's potential influence on Capitol Hill. Indeed, one internal memo referred to him as a "bellwether" who could convince others to reconsider their support of the war and the administration.<sup>16</sup> It would be this role that he would continue to play throughout America's longest war.

Joining Cooper in opposing the war was the ranking Republican member of the Senate, Vermont's George D. Aiken. A veteran legislator who had a reputation for bipartisanship and reasonableness, Aiken saw Vietnam as an unwinnable war that threatened to have devastating domestic consequences for the United States—high casualties, a weakened economy, a divided populace, the end of bipartisanship, and a dangerous extension of executive power.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the Senator consistently maintained that the United States did have a limited commitment to South Vietnam based primarily on its responsibility for having transported hundreds of thousands of refugees from the north after the 1954 Geneva Accords. Nevertheless, he remained pessimistic about American prospects for success in South Vietnam. Aiken told one constituent, "There is no doubt about it—the situation in Vietnam is a mess and is getting worse. I have made it clear that I am opposed to the expansion of military operations in Vietnam." He went on to lament, "I wish the American people would be told the facts, or at least the Congress should be told the truth. We are not kept adequately informed."<sup>18</sup> This would become a common refrain during the next four years among Republicans as they attacked the administration for the growing "credibility gap" on the war.<sup>19</sup>

In a television interview following the attack on Pleiku in February 1965, Aiken expressed his frustration over the catch-22 in Vietnam. "I am sorry to say that the situation in Vietnam is still deteriorating ... we cannot withdraw at this time. The situation is intolerable. It cannot go on. We have the choice of either negotiation or all-out war. Negotiation will be difficult. All-out war unthinkable."<sup>20</sup> Similar feelings were expressed by others within the GOP. On March 25, 1965, Cooper and New York Senator Jacob Javits called for negotiations for a settlement, without preconditions on either side. Cooper affirmed his support for Johnson's policy of backing South Vietnam but said that the administration had to show more flexibility on the diplomatic front. "I do not believe that we can reach negotiations by imposing as a prerequisite that the Communists cease their intervention, rightful as our position is. For then we stand in confrontation, with a position of unconditional surrender and with the possibility of war as the only arbiter." The same day, Cooper introduced a resolution in the Senate calling for a full briefing by Rusk and McNamara for the entire Senate.<sup>21</sup>

Yet while the hawks in both parties clamored for a stronger American effort in Vietnam, virtually none of the leading opponents of the war in either party—including Mansfield, Aiken, and Cooper—were

fully prepared to confront the administration publicly over the war. To be sure, their criticisms of American policy and support of negotiations were credible, but they weakened their cause by ultimately supporting the president's meager efforts at peace and reaffirming their belief in an American responsibility to provide assistance to Saigon. Very few members of Congress were willing to say what they really believed at this juncture—that South Vietnam was not worth the price of a major U.S. military effort and that a negotiated settlement would not harm American credibility and prestige in the long-run. This reticence on the part of leading congressional figures opposed to the expansion of the war—the “permissive context” described by Fredrik Logevall—had to be a relief to the administration, which had fully planned the buildup of American forces in Southeast Asia and wanted to avoid a probing, full-scale debate on the issue during the first half of 1965.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Cooper's opposition to an Americanized war in Vietnam was apparent well in advance of the key decisions of 1965. As the escalation of U.S. military involvement in South Vietnam continued, Cooper consistently urged a political solution to the conflict.<sup>23</sup> His conviction that a military solution to the war could never succeed was buttressed when he visited South Vietnam in December 1965 and January 1966. In January—as the Johnson administration made clear it planned to resume bombing North Vietnam after a pause—Cooper expressed strong opposition and urged Johnson to seek a negotiated peace. During a meeting in the Oval Office on January 26, 1966, Cooper approached the president with his views. When Johnson would give no assurances that he would fully pursue such a settlement, Cooper spoke forcefully on the Senate floor that afternoon to publicly call for the immediate beginning of peace talks: “Negotiations, not escalation, should be the dominant theme of our activity now.” The process, he argued, could start with a ceasefire supervised and enforced by the United Nations and lasting up to five years, after which there would be national elections as called for in the 1954 Geneva agreement.<sup>24</sup>

Cooper added that the Viet Cong would have to be included in any negotiations, “because it is obvious that neither negotiations nor a settlement are possible without their inclusion.”<sup>25</sup> Above all, he stated, Americanization of the war was a mistake that had to be stopped:

This is essentially a political and not a military conflict. It is a battle in Vietnam for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese. It must be limited to Vietnam, and be fought by the Vietnamese if we are to

have any realistic hope of an acceptable settlement ... It is crucial that the war in Vietnam not be allowed to escalate further. Now is the time to make every conscientious effort to de-escalate the conflict. For the escalation there is no practical hope of achieving our aims in that unfortunate country and the very real possibility of an Asian wide war in which America would waste her resources and young men in a slaughter that could achieve nothing but these desperate conditions of chaos ideal for the spread of communism.<sup>26</sup>

Although a powerful appeal for an alternative to the present situation, Cooper's speech fell upon deaf ears in the administration. The bombing resumed and the build-up of American forces continued. Yet Cooper's constant advocacy of negotiations was gaining attention nationally. In April 1966, he declared publicly that the United States had long since fulfilled any obligation to the Saigon regime that it might have had and that it would be foolish to fight on behalf of a people who would not fight for themselves. The *New York Times* responded by calling Cooper a man "whose views command respect on both sides of the aisle." The paper spoke of the growing misgivings in the Senate and speculated that the moderate and sober Cooper could pull many fence-sitting lawmakers to his side.<sup>27</sup> This would be of particular importance during the forthcoming campaign season.

The 1966 midterm elections stood as a pivotal campaign for the Republican Party. Indeed, Republicans looked forward to the campaign with great optimism. Midterm elections traditionally result in gains for the minority party, particularly when the White House is occupied by a president of the majority party. Republican leaders knew that the political pendulum would swing back in their favor following the catastrophic results in 1964. Realistically, the GOP had nowhere to go but up. Vietnam loomed as a potentially important issue in the congressional campaigns in 1966. Not only had American combat troops been committed to the defense of South Vietnam for 18 months with little tangible evidence of success, but the Fulbright hearings on the administration's decision to involve the United States in the Southeast Asian conflict intensified public scrutiny of the war.<sup>28</sup> With over a quarter of a million troops in country (and requests for nearly 200,000 more from the commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland), and no immediate prospect for victory, the war could have been a significant electoral issue in 1966. Conceivably, the growing concern with the progress

of the war could serve Republican candidates well against the president's party in November.

Yet GOP congressional leaders shied away from taking advantage of the administration's difficulties. Two of the most influential (and hawkish) Republican members of the House of Representatives, minority leader Gerald Ford of Michigan and Melvin Laird of Wisconsin, advised their colleagues not to focus on the Vietnam issue during their campaigns. Both agreed, however, that the war would play a major role in the midterm elections. Ford went so far as to comment that he believed "Vietnam is going to be a liability to any incumbent" in November.<sup>29</sup> One candidate who did use the war as an issue in his campaign was Illinois GOP senatorial hopeful Charles H. Percy, who defeated incumbent Paul H. Douglas in the election. Percy attributed his victory to "voter dissatisfaction with inflation, the war in Vietnam, and 'Civil rights and civil disorder.'"<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, Percy ran as an opponent of the war and attacked Douglas for his hawkish stance on the war and support of the administration's policies.

Although Vietnam figured only peripherally in the campaign, the results in 1966 could not have been scripted better for the Republican Party. Thanks in good measure to the tireless campaigning of Richard Nixon, the GOP gained 47 seats in the House of Representatives, three in the Senate, eight governorships (including a decisive win in the critical California election), and over 500 state legislative seats.<sup>31</sup> In the wake of their national resurgence, Republicans turned their attention to the presidential campaign two years hence. Given their success in the recent polling, the possibility that the Johnson administration would remain bogged down in Vietnam, and the latent dissatisfaction over the evolution of the Great Society, party officials could not be blamed for feeling very optimistic about the party's chances to regain the White House in 1968. Indeed, during the campaign, Nixon began to position himself for a presidential run in 1968 by softening his Vietnam rhetoric—for example, backing an all-Asian conference on the war foreshadowed his Vietnamization policy—and portraying himself as a voice of reason in contrast to Johnson, exactly what the president had done to Goldwater in 1964.

That the administration was concerned with Nixon in particular and the Republicans in general is clear from the documentary record. For example, during a lunch meeting with Johnson shortly after the election, national security adviser Walt W. Rostow noted that the president instructed Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to meet with

Dirksen to “explain our policy” prior to an upcoming meeting of the Republican Coordinating Committee.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Johnson wanted Rostow to find examples of Eisenhower’s statements on Vietnam that showed the administration acting in accordance with advice that had been given by the former president as additional domestic political protection for Johnson’s decisions.<sup>33</sup> Obviously, with the Republican gains in Congress the previous week, Johnson wanted to shield himself from renewed partisan strife on the war that he feared would come from Republicans who had regained the confidence and national support they had lost in 1964 while concurrently securing his domestic agenda.<sup>34</sup>

By 1967, Vietnam had split both parties and new coalitions emerged, with Republicans such as Cooper and Aiken siding with antiwar Democrats.<sup>35</sup> The doves had been increasingly in the spotlight ever since the Fulbright hearings on the war the previous year. Meanwhile, Nixon and Eisenhower stood with Johnson’s Democratic supporters like Mississippi’s John Stennis in support of the overall war effort, although not always the president’s tactics. As Barry Goldwater asserted in a letter to the editor in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, “I have probably been more active in the support of Johnson’s policies in Vietnam as he is now conducting them than have most Democrats.”<sup>36</sup> As the partisan lines blurred and Americans began to show signs of exhaustion with the fighting, congressional sentiment against the war began to pick up steam.

Opponents of the conflict were no longer looked upon as political mavericks and even previously staunch supporters of the war, such as Senator Thruston Morton (R-KY), began to question the wisdom of the American commitment to Vietnam and broke openly with the administration.<sup>37</sup> For example, Senator Jacob Javits had been “an ardent supporter” of the war, backing the administration through the initial escalation of American involvement in 1965. Yet even then he had expressed doubts about the direction of the war.<sup>38</sup> Finally, Javits decided he could no longer support the president’s position. In his speech on February 12, 1967, Javits said that Johnson had “become locked into the mistakes, illusions, and overoptimistic predictions of his own policies. He is so busy defending himself, making excuses, and changing facts and figures that he appears to many to have lost the initiative and credibility to make peace on his own.” According to Javits, the United States had to find a negotiated way out of the war and the GOP had to demonstrate that it had learned the lesson of Vietnam—that the American people “cannot afford and are not interested in being the policeman of the world.”<sup>39</sup> Javits and Morton were not alone in their concern over

the lengthening conflict. The American public was growing increasingly restless as the long-promised victory over the Hanoi regime and its Viet Cong allies failed to materialize, and opinion polls began to show a steady decline in support for the administration's policies.

The growing public concern about the war paralleled stepped-up Republican efforts to de-escalate American participation in the conflict. For example, on May 19, 1967, Representative Paul Findley of Illinois presented a joint resolution in the House "to refer the war issues in Vietnam to the International Court of Justice at The Hague for adjudication." The proposal, which was introduced as an amendment to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, "would demonstrate forcibly our desire to settle the issues by judicial process rather than force, clarify them in terms of international law, and accept as binding the judgment of the tribunal." In addition, Findley continued, it would test Hanoi's sincerity for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. If they accepted, the war would end. If they refused, "the enemy would be weakened in the important field of international opinion because it would have scorned the world's highest tribunal." Further, if the Court found in favor of the American position, the United States would secure an international mandate for its military efforts and political position in Vietnam. America would no longer be isolated. Findley considered international law to be "the missing piece of the Vietnam jigsaw puzzle" that would "strengthen our position" if it failed.<sup>40</sup>

Another suggestion was made by a group of congressmen led by Bradford Morse (R-MA) and Robert Stafford (R-VT). They unveiled a proposal for a staged de-escalation of the bombing of North Vietnam on July 10, 1967. Under this plan, the United States would halt all bombing of North Vietnam north of the 21st parallel for 60 days, including Hanoi but excluding Haiphong. If the Hanoi regime responded with a similarly limited but verifiable de-escalatory step, America would extend the bombing ban north of the 20th parallel. Through a series of reciprocal steps, the bombing of the North would eventually be ended along with the North Vietnamese support to the South. While Morse and his colleagues admitted that Hanoi had not shown "a sincere interest in peace," they pointed to the deficiencies in previous bombing pauses undertaken by the Johnson administration and cited a number of reasons why the new plan would succeed. They argued that the proposal involved minimum military risk to both sides, gave Hanoi the chance to "save face," and did not deal in ultimatums or threats. They concluded, "We are not yet convinced that Hanoi has no interest in peace, but we

are convinced that the possibility has not yet been tested by creative and sensitive U.S. diplomacy.”<sup>41</sup>

As a growing number of Republicans came out against the war, hawks like Eisenhower and Tower pressed the administration to be more assertive in Vietnam. On NBC's "Today Show" on August 16, 1967, Tower argued that the United States had "to maintain unrelenting pressure on the enemy, that we cannot pull out with anything like reasonable terms until we show the enemy that we are determined to achieve military success, that we're determined to militarily secure South Vietnam." The only way to accomplish that, he continued, was "by maintaining unrelenting military pressure by bombing every target of major significance in the North ... [and] close the port of Haiphong."<sup>42</sup> Even with the influential voices of Aiken, Javits, and Cooper pushing for a negotiated settlement to the conflict, the GOP remained as divided as the Democrats when it came to the Vietnam War.

Republicans with doubts about the war began to turn their attention to the party's presidential nominee in 1968. Cooper threw his support behind Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York, who had long-standing presidential ambitions but had failed to win the GOP nomination in both 1960 and 1964. Cooper told the press in the fall of 1967 that the New York governor was the best man for the job, both in terms of domestic policy and foreign affairs.<sup>43</sup> Aiken believed that Michigan Governor George W. Romney, the leading Republican presidential hopeful in national polls following the 1966 elections, should be the party's nominee in 1968 because "he would try to get us out of this war (in Vietnam).'" Nixon, he contended, had been "altogether too hawkish in his views and pronouncements on the war."<sup>44</sup> And newly elected Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon advocated that the GOP be the "peace party" in 1968, and supported an effort to "de-Americanize the whole Vietnam War," although he did not mention any candidate in particular he would support.<sup>45</sup>

These Republican doves formed a tacit alliance with antiwar Democrats and lobbied Johnson to find a way for the United States to extricate itself honorably from the conflict. Perhaps the most intriguing of these contacts occurred daily between Aiken and Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield. Longtime colleagues and friends, the two had breakfast together every morning and knew each other so well that they would be able to play off of each other when it came to their views on Vietnam without having to discuss the strategy overtly. This came in handy since Mansfield could not say things publicly the way he wrote to

Johnson privately, whereas Aiken could. Conversely, Aiken—who by 1967 was referring to the war as a “debacle” that reminded him of the ancient Romans, “so concerned with their own world prestige that they forgot what was going on at home”—could not confront the GOP hawks directly. Mansfield, however, could laud Aiken’s stance as the Senate’s “wise old owl” and attack the hawks with harsher language than Aiken—who would simply state that he was “somewhat disturbed” by hawkish statements.<sup>46</sup> The two composed a formidable team which the administration had to contend with when making decisions on the war; since their critiques predated even Fulbright’s break with Johnson, this bipartisan coalition could not be simply written off as the ravings of a maverick like Morse or as merely partisan politics.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to note, however, that virtually no member of Congress from either party advocated the unilateral withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia, and only token opposition faced the administration’s budgetary requests for continued support of the ongoing commitment to Saigon’s defense.<sup>48</sup> This demonstrated again the limits of the protest against the war. Moreover, it seemed clear to observers at the time that the liberal wing of the party had very little chance of controlling the Vietnam issue at the 1968 convention. With Nixon, Eisenhower, California governor Ronald Reagan, and virtually the entire Republican congressional leadership supporting a bipartisan policy on the war and pushing for victory, it was “almost inconceivable that a Republican dove could be nominated,” according to William S. White of the *Washington Post*. If the Romney and Percy wing of the party had any hope of gaining the nomination, they had to “clear themselves up on Vietnam.”<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, support for an antiwar candidate continued to grow within the GOP. In September 1967, Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, a staunch supporter of the war, called for the Republican nominee to run as a peace candidate in 1968.<sup>50</sup> Some Democrats believed that even the hawkish Nixon would run as a dove against Johnson. Senator Stuart Symington (D-MO) told national security adviser Walt W. Rostow, “We are getting in deeper and deeper [in Vietnam] with no end in sight. In 1968, Nixon will murder us. He will become the biggest dove of all times.”<sup>51</sup> Regardless of how members of the Republican Party felt about the war, however, they recognized the centrality of Vietnam in 1968. David C. Roller, an assistant professor of history at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, wrote to Thruston Morton in mid-1967 and told him that the GOP “may be on the verge of

recapturing the support of academics,” which had been a traditional Republican constituency until 1933. The issue, that could return the professorate to the party fold, Roller wrote, was Vietnam—due to the “considerable distrust of Johnson, disgust with the administration’s deepening involvement, and apprehension over our escalating objectives and expanding military involvement.”<sup>52</sup> It remained to be seen whether the Republicans could capitalize on the public’s disenchantment with the war to craft a coherent and unifying policy on the war for the 1968 elections.

Indeed, some members of the party had difficulty defining their own position on the war. For example, George Romney had been a supporter of the president’s Vietnam policies since he visited Vietnam in late 1965.<sup>53</sup> He told Dwight Eisenhower upon his return that he saw the situation in South Vietnam as a “clear-cut and fundamental” struggle in which the “issues are the same that brought our country into existence.”<sup>54</sup> The next day, in a speech at the University of Detroit, the governor told students he was “now convinced the war in Vietnam involves circumstances much more complex and fateful than any war in which our country has been involved,” calling the conflict “morally right and necessary.”<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately for Romney, his subsequent statements on the war were neither as clear nor as convincing. In July 1966, *Newsweek* criticized both Romney and the GOP for their positions on the war. Since Johnson escalated the conflict in March 1965, the magazine opined, “The Republicans have been groping for a viable way to capitalize on it. No one has groped more earnestly than Michigan’s governor George Romney—but he has shifted his ground on the issue so many times that by now probably not even Mrs. Romney is sure where he stands.” *Harper’s* sounded similar concerns, arguing that Romney’s “confusing remarks are not the guileful ambiguities of a Nixon but rather the product of ignorance and genuine uncertainty complicated by a terrible need to be right, both ethically and politically.”<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately for the governor and the GOP, the leading candidate for the nomination would shortly make one of the most blatantly self-defeating comments in American political history.

On August 31, 1967, Governor Romney made a statement that, in hindsight, would prove to be the death-knell of his presidential ambitions. In a taped interview with Lou Gordon of WKBD-TV in Detroit, Romney said, “When I came back from Viet Nam [in November 1965], I’d just had the greatest brainwashing that anybody can get.” He proceeded to make a quantum shift in his position on the war. “I no longer

believe that it was necessary for us to get involved in South Vietnam to stop Communist aggression in Southeast Asia," he declared. Decrying the "tragic" conflict, he urged "a sound peace in South Vietnam at an early time."<sup>57</sup> In essence, Romney disavowed American participation in the war and moved one hundred eighty degrees away from his earlier belief that the war was "morally right and necessary." The connotation of brainwashing following the experiences of the American military in Korea and the popular perception of the term in the wake of *The Manchurian Candidate* made Romney's comments even more devastating.

Although the governor and his campaign staff subsequently attempted to clarify his remarks<sup>58</sup> and some Republicans came to his defense,<sup>59</sup> Romney's "brainwashing" statement seriously damaged his status as the GOP frontrunner. The interview generated an immediate maelstrom of controversy and derision from fellow Republicans, Democrats eager to tarnish the governor's reputation, and the media. Robert Stafford sounded a common concern among party members in a television interview in his native Vermont. "If you're running for the presidency," he asserted, "you are supposed to have too much on the ball to be brainwashed."<sup>60</sup> The implication was that if Romney could be fooled by Americans, how could he possibly conduct a meaningful foreign policy in the face of the Soviet threat?<sup>61</sup> Much less charitable was Ohio Governor James Rhodes, who later said of his colleague's entire campaign, "Watching George Romney run for the Presidency was like watching a duck try to make love to a football."<sup>62</sup>

The statement placed Romney in a unique position among presidential hopefuls. In denying the validity of the war, CBS's Eric Sevareid commented, "Romney has broken the pattern of all the potential presidential candidates. None of the others has gone anywhere near this far." To his credit, Sevareid continued, Romney had "joined a distinct and growing pattern involving scores of other serious minded citizens, in Congress and out."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, while opinion had begun to turn against the war in Vietnam, only a handful of politicians in either party had made such blunt statements against the war at this juncture. Sevareid's recognition of Romney's "unique" status, accurate though it was, did not insulate the governor from further criticism even from those who had previously backed him.

Further, the governor's comments demolished his year-long lead in the polls. In its first poll following Romney's gaffe, the *Los Angeles Times* found that among Republican voters, support for his candidacy

had fallen dramatically. According to the survey, Nixon was chosen as the GOP candidate by 28 percent of those polled, Romney received 13 percent, Rockefeller 13 percent, and Reagan 11 percent.<sup>64</sup> A mid-September Harris poll showed Romney plunging to fourth place in the race, and when he officially entered the race on November 18, his standing had sunk so low that many observers considered him as merely a stand-in for Rockefeller.<sup>65</sup> Romney could no longer be considered the frontrunner, and his status as a viable challenger for the nomination was now in question.<sup>66</sup> As in sports, momentum is a critical intangible feature in a political campaign. Romney's had evaporated. Although in retrospect the "brainwashing" statement might appear to be simply a footnote to the story of the 1968 presidential election, Romney's comments were "huge in public thinking at the time" and mortally wounded his promising presidential campaign.<sup>67</sup>

There are two reasons for the precipitous and rapid decline in Romney's political fortunes following the WKBD interview. First, despite latent congressional opposition and a growing uncertainty about the war among the American people, public opinion remained generally (although decreasingly) optimistic regarding the possibility of victory through 1967. Thus, Romney's lamentations regarding the dim prospect of achieving U.S. goals in Vietnam did not resonate with voters as much as they would have after the Tet Offensive. In addition, Romney's political views placed him to the left of the core of the Republican Party; the Charles Percy–John Lindsay–Nelson Rockefeller wing of the party was clearly losing its influence to the more conservative forces led by Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. Indeed, the late 1960s would mark the last gasp of liberal Republicanism.<sup>68</sup>

In late September, Thruston Morton attempted to divert attention from Romney (and the party) to the administration, charging that it was Johnson "who had been brainwashed on Vietnam, by the American 'military-industrial complex'" as early as 1961. Morton believed that Johnson had been "mistakenly committed to a military solution in Vietnam" since 1963, "with only a brief pause during the election campaign of 1964 to brainwash the American people." Morton called for an immediate end to the bombing of North Vietnam and search-and-destroy missions in the South. While he opposed abrupt withdrawal, he said that the United States "'must open up every possible avenue toward negotiations.'"<sup>69</sup> These statements resonated with many within the party and underscored the "credibility gap" critique that was a staple of Republican political speeches.

Romney's rhetorical blunder led to increased speculation among the party faithful that New York governor Nelson Rockefeller would enter the fray. Rockefeller was not the only New York politician who had an eye on the nomination, however. Senator Jacob Javits briefly mulled a run for the GOP bid, but eventually decided to remain in the Senate and support a negotiated withdrawal from the war from his position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. New York City mayor John Lindsay believed that "the 1968 Republican Presidential candidate should be a dove on Vietnam to give the voters an alternative to President Johnson's policy." To Lindsay—who harbored presidential ambitions himself—Charles Percy was the strongest nominee. Senator Percy was "the only potential Republican candidate with a consistent position on" Vietnam.<sup>70</sup> But the chances of Percy's nomination were slim, Romney's plunge in the polls notwithstanding, and Rockefeller remained ambiguous about his intentions. As a result, by the end of 1967 the Republican nomination was Richard Nixon's to lose.

As the Republican primary season approached, the situation in Vietnam remained stalemated and unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future, looming like the sword of Damocles. Moreover, the division within the party and the nation over the war would influence the campaign as well. In a December 1967 speech, Cooper spoke of "growing pessimism" about the possibility of a negotiated settlement—the escalating violence had caused both sides to dig in too deeply—and said that any last shred of hope for peace talks depended on the administration resisting an extension of the war. Cooper knew such an expansion was under consideration; he had been appointed to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the beginning of 1967 and was aware that the administration contemplated a move against enemy sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. Cooper's response was simple: Don't do it.<sup>71</sup>

His speech received praise from both sides of the aisle. Yet the plaudits did not move the administration, which continued with its efforts to win the war. At the beginning of 1968, however, Vietnam had polarized the country to such a degree that Romney's alleged fence sitting was the exception rather than the rule. Even as vocal opposition to the war on college campuses and the nation's editorial pages increased in the face of the military impasse in Vietnam, hawks in both parties sought to escalate the war further to achieve victory.<sup>72</sup> Caught in the middle of these forces, Johnson and his advisers struggled to win the military war in Southeast Asia and concurrently win the political war back home. The president's annual report to the nation would be a

signal to both the hawks and doves as to which way the administration's policy would evolve over the coming months.

The Vietnam section of Lyndon Johnson's State of the Union address drew a strong response from the Republican Party, and gave a clear indication of the direction most members of the GOP's leadership were leaning.<sup>73</sup> A month earlier, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak had written that "House Republicans are convinced that if the official position of the party on Vietnam is more or less a carbon copy of the Johnson administration's, the Republican Party will have kicked away one of their strongest resources in the election—the deep discontent over the war in every part of the nation."<sup>74</sup> In an effort to distinguish their policy from that of the administration, the GOP designed a made-for-television response to the speech in which it intended to rebuke the president's position and stake out its own stance on the key issues of the coming campaign.

Senators John Tower of Texas and Peter Dominick of Colorado, both hard-liners on the war, were selected to present the GOP's rebuttal on the Vietnam section of the speech.<sup>75</sup> Tower denounced the administration for "a self-defeating policy of 'gradualism'" and charged that the "war could be over today if the Johnson administration had acted with determination instead of vacillation." Yet neither senator presented a specific alternative to Johnson's policy, choosing instead to criticize in their role as the loyal opposition. The *Christian Science Monitor* opined that the response was "a mobilization of dissatisfaction, with no specific alternative to the present policy ... The approach laid down by congressional Republicans on Vietnam appears to foreshadow a difference of degree rather than of ideology." The Republicans "accept President Johnson's basic postulates on the causes and goals of the war ... It is the manner of fighting rather than the cause of fighting that is at issue." The paper complained that if this continued to be the main thrust of Republican policy on the war, "the voter in November might not have a clear-cut choice between hawks and doves in the rival parties," which would serve to subordinate Vietnam as an issue in the election.<sup>76</sup>

Clearly, the GOP wanted to distance itself from the administration's war for the electoral season ahead, but the party's congressional leadership did not want to paint itself into a corner with a specific policy prescription; flexibility was the watchword. Moreover, not everyone in the party agreed with the Tower/Dominick strategy. After the speech, Cooper and Javits asserted that it did not represent mainstream Republican opinion, and called yet again for a negotiated settlement to

the conflict. Thus, much like the rest of the country, the Republican Party remained divided on the war, which appeared to have reached a stalemate favoring the United States and its South Vietnamese allies by the first month of 1968. At this juncture, however, Vietnam remained central to the battle for the GOP nomination. The Republicans were in an awkward position. Attacking Johnson's Vietnam policies was one thing, but offering solutions on how to successfully conclude the war was another matter entirely, especially given recent events in Vietnam. Every candidate for the GOP nomination, regardless of his stance on the war, realized the need to maintain flexibility for the campaign against Johnson in the fall.<sup>77</sup>

In the wake of Romney's withdrawal from the race in late February after a dismal showing in New Hampshire, Nixon could move even closer to the center of the political spectrum.<sup>78</sup> Speaking to a Republican gathering in Nashua, New Hampshire, on March 5, Nixon pledged to "end the war and win the peace."<sup>79</sup> In this and subsequent statements on the war, Nixon "walked a tightrope of meaning, using nuanced words and phrases to keep his balance." For doves and moderates, he emphasized nonmilitary steps toward peace; for hawks and conservatives he talked about maintaining pressure on Hanoi and the Viet Cong and *winning* the peace.<sup>80</sup> This, then, was Nixon's challenge: to woo the doves while holding on to the hawks and staying true to his own foreign policy convictions. Fortunately for Nixon, the diverse opinion on the war that pervaded the country in early 1968 allowed him to propose politically appealing courses of action to disparate parts of the electorate without abandoning his own foreign policy goals and strategies.<sup>81</sup> This "middle-of-the-road" strategy, former Nixon speech writer Richard Whalen noted in his memoirs, was intended not to discover the most valid solution for Vietnam, but rather "to find the least assailable middle ground" that would secure the Republican nomination and enhance Nixon's chances for success in November.<sup>82</sup>

Yet in March, Nixon nearly tripped over his own words. In an off-the-cuff remark to reporters on March 11, he said that if elected he would end the war in Vietnam, but would not now tell Hanoi what he would offer them as president. The media jumped on this statement and announced that the former vice president had a "secret plan" to end the war, leading to rampant speculation about what such a proposal would entail. Contrary to contemporary media accounts and an astonishing amount of subsequent scholarship, Nixon did not actually say that he had a secret plan, although to be fair, he never officially denied having

one. Indeed, a memorandum in the files of the Republican National Committee acknowledges that Nixon did indicate that he had definite ideas on how to end the war through Vietnamization.<sup>83</sup> Yet these ideas, to the extent that they were formed, were not revealed even to Nixon's closest confidants. Even Eisenhower, who wrote for details of the plan, could not elicit any specifics from his former vice president.<sup>84</sup> Critics of the alleged plan were numerous. One potential rival, Nelson Rockefeller, wondered aloud why Nixon would "keep a plan [to end the war] a secret when hundreds die each week?"<sup>85</sup>

Despite this criticism of Nixon—which sounded like campaign rhetoric—Rockefeller stunned the political community by announcing his withdrawal from the race on 21 March. "I have decided today," he stated, "to reiterate unequivocally that I am not a candidate campaigning directly or indirectly for the presidency of the United States."<sup>86</sup> Suddenly, Nixon stood alone. With Romney's campaign a fading memory, Rockefeller's disavowal of interest, and the lack of a realistic challenge from Ronald Reagan or other potential dark-horse candidates (hawk or dove), Nixon's nomination seemed to be a foregone conclusion.<sup>87</sup> On March 25, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial put it succinctly: "Nixon has the nomination 'all but in the bag.'"<sup>88</sup> However, Nixon and his advisers recognized that if he were to be a serious threat to Johnson in November, the former vice president would need to make a definitive statement on Vietnam soon to silence critics who questioned whether he truly had an idea of how to end the war or if it was so much political smoke and mirrors.

Nixon aide William Safire advised the candidate to elaborate his position for the nation and make a major policy speech on Vietnam. After initially being reluctant, Nixon decided to give a series of national radio addresses to develop his position for the public.<sup>89</sup> Ever the political realist, Nixon had "come to the conclusion that there's no way to win the war." As he told his speech writers, however, "we can't say that, of course. In fact, we have to seem to say the opposite, just to keep some degree of bargaining leverage."<sup>90</sup> Fortunately for Nixon's campaign, he never had to give his speech, which had originally been scheduled for March 31.<sup>91</sup>

Upon discovering the president would address the nation, Nixon canceled his remarks to await Johnson's statement. Nixon posited that Johnson "had adopted the very plan Nixon was going to propose" in the aborted radio message, and the GOP frontrunner wanted to be in a position to take advantage of anything the president said. As Stephen

Ambrose has noted, "This was no accident—the two men had been together on Vietnam right along, except that Nixon had always been just ahead of Johnson."<sup>92</sup> The president's statement paralleled Nixon's proposed comments almost exactly, except for the shocking coda in which Johnson stated categorically that he would not seek reelection in November. Johnson's announcement seemed to make the fall campaign more unpredictable since the GOP candidate would not be able to specifically attack the president for the stalemated conflict. More importantly for Nixon, it eliminated his need to present a detailed strategy to end the fighting prior to the Republican convention in August.

Indeed, Nixon took full advantage of Johnson's withdrawal. The following day, he issued a statement declaring a self-imposed "moratorium" on comments on Vietnam.<sup>93</sup> By doing so, he insulated himself from criticism on the war while retaining the flexibility to break the silence when he saw fit since Vietnam remained a critical issue in the campaign. In Nixon's mind, neither Robert F. Kennedy nor Hubert Humphrey, the frontrunners for the Democratic nomination, were as vulnerable on Vietnam as Johnson would have been. Yet the president could still be in a position to use Vietnam to his and his party's advantage. A significant peace gesture could give the Democratic nominee a significant boost in the polls and could potentially lead Johnson to reenter the race. Thus Nixon continued his strategy of taking the middle course, saying as little as possible about Vietnam while maintaining the public posture that he did not want to interfere with Johnson's efforts or undermine his own negotiating position should he become president. Nevertheless, he publicly warned Johnson against the "temptations of a camouflaged surrender" and told reporters that he believed there was room to negotiate an acceptable settlement in Vietnam.<sup>94</sup>

Johnson's withdrawal also broached the possibility of a revived Rockefeller candidacy; indeed, the president secretly urged Rockefeller to reenter the race as an alternative to Nixon. Since many identified Nixon and Johnson together when it came to Vietnam, Rockefeller presented a plausible alternative to Nixon and either of the more dovish Democratic candidates. If he were to be taken seriously as a legitimate candidate, however, Rockefeller would have to confront the Vietnam issue directly. As Theodore White wrote, "on the dominant issue of the moment, Vietnam, he had neither public nor private posture."<sup>95</sup> The perennial candidate remained hesitant to discuss the war throughout the spring, which left his potential return to the campaign stuck in neutral.

The debate over the Vietnam issue continued within the Republican Party without Rockefeller's input. Representative John Rhodes (R-AZ) told a constituent on April 29 that the United States "should continue to keep up our strength" in Vietnam and rely on military force to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, opposition to the war increased within the party as more members of Congress came out in favor of a negotiated withdrawal—not very surprising considering most of them faced reelection themselves in the fall. The polarization of the party raised questions among the GOP leadership regarding the convention platform. How would the party deal with Vietnam? Could the Republicans avoid a disastrous split over the war and present a united front against the Democrats?

However, as the saying goes, two weeks is a long time in politics, and there were still three months to the convention. In the meantime, the race for the nomination intensified. At a luncheon with GOP senators in late April, Rockefeller finally spoke out on the war, noting that the party was far from "monolithic" on the issue of the war. Specifically, he questioned Nixon's proposal that there be a moratorium on Vietnam discussion while efforts were being made to arrange peace talks. If preliminary negotiations with Hanoi lasted until November and such a moratorium were applied literally, Rockefeller argued, Vietnam would be barred from political debate for the entire election. Rockefeller stated, "I think there can be and should be discussion and criticism, and if it is handled properly it will not jeopardize the nation."<sup>97</sup> With an emerging Vietnam position and the support of several influential GOP senators, Rockefeller posed a potential threat to Nixon's nomination if he decided to run.

Nixon also had to contend with his lingering reputation as a political loser. Although the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* asserted that the 1966 elections had "annihilated the argument that Nixon is a 'loser,' a candidate who cannot win," Nixon could not shake the reality of his electoral past.<sup>98</sup> Having already lost a presidential contest in 1960—not to mention the 1962 California gubernatorial election—many within the party considered Nixon a flawed candidate who could not win a national election against any Democratic opponent. This perception of the former vice president gained credence when Rockefeller won the Massachusetts primary on April 30 as a write-in candidate with 30 percent of the vote; Nixon only managed to finish third with 25.8 percent of the vote (also as a write-in).<sup>99</sup>

Despite his public disavowal of interest in the nomination in March, Rockefeller enjoyed the support of a substantial segment of the party. Thruston Morton considered him to be an “able and proven administrator” and “a winner”—clearly a swipe at Nixon—and supported Rockefeller’s dovish position on the war.<sup>100</sup> Charles Percy, who had considered his own run for the GOP nomination, eventually announced his support for Rockefeller, calling him “the only Presidential candidate who has set forth a detailed program to end the war. His recent peace plan is a constructive contribution to the dialogue on this issue.”<sup>101</sup> And Cooper contended that the country would “only vote for a candidate who clearly states his views on Vietnam and forthrightly explains in what ways he intends to lead the United States from the mistake in Vietnam.” Among Republicans, he argued, “only Governor Rockefeller has spoken out with clarity and firm direction.”<sup>102</sup>

Buoyed by his surprising success in Massachusetts, Rockefeller broke his long silence on Vietnam in a speech at the World Affairs Council in Philadelphia.<sup>103</sup> In his first concrete statement on the war since 1964, he advocated reversing the Americanization of the war and turning more responsibility over to the South Vietnamese. Yet he cautioned against permitting opposition to the war to result in a renewed isolationism. Peace negotiations, he argued, should include nonacceptance of any solution dictated by force, and acceptance in South Vietnam’s life of any group that sought its objectives through the political process. The *New York Times* editorialized the next day that the Johnson administration “should not find much to differ with in this analysis.”<sup>104</sup> The New York governor’s speech came too late to have any substantive impact on the nomination, but it did serve notice to the party that the moderate wing of the party would have to play a role in developing the GOP platform plank on Vietnam at the August convention.

That fact did not stop Rockefeller from continuing to attack both Nixon and Johnson on the war. The administration, Rockefeller believed, wrongly used the assumptions of World War II to inform the American presence in Vietnam.<sup>105</sup> In a speech to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco on 13 June, he criticized the Democrats for an “out-dated political understanding. On the whole, we have acted as if we were trying to defend stable European political structures, as in the 1940s.” This approach, he argued, failed to recognize the need to “create entirely new political structures for Southeast Asia.”<sup>106</sup> Three days later, Reagan weighed in on who should participate in those structures. On CBS’s “Face the Nation,” he asserted, “I don’t hope for the kind of

peace that would result in, say, a concession that would allow the Viet Cong to be a part of the South Vietnamese government.” That would be “about the same as the United States government taking the Cosa Nostra in as partners.”<sup>107</sup> Reagan’s comments were representative of many in the GOP who refused to consider any settlement that included participation of members of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in a postwar government in South Vietnam.

The following week, Rockefeller decided to confront Nixon’s stance on the war directly. Discussing Nixon’s proposal to declare a moratorium on discussion of ending the war, Rockefeller said, “Did a refuge in silence seem the safest haven for a prophet who had been proven so wrong? ... There must be an alternative to indefinite war.” Rather than accepting Nixon’s “belligerent prophecies” on Vietnam—“We have to stop it with victory, or it will start all over again in a few years”—the governor called the prospect of military victory “imagined” and made a plea to “avoid the deadly spiral of endless escalation.”<sup>108</sup> Most of Rockefeller’s comments to this point had been directed at the positions of others; he would soon end his reluctance to assert his own policy proposal.

On July 14, Rockefeller held a news conference at the New York Hilton and announced a comprehensive four-stage plan to end the war. It would be the most important foreign policy declaration of his renewed presidential campaign. The plan, which Rockefeller drafted in consultation with Professor Henry Kissinger of Harvard<sup>109</sup> and General James Gavin, staked out a middle position between Nixon and Democratic ultra-dove Senator Eugene McCarthy. The proposal called for North Vietnamese troops to pull back toward the demilitarized zone and the borders of Cambodia and Laos; North Vietnamese regulars and “fillers” in Viet Cong units and most allied forces withdrawing from South Vietnam; free elections under international supervision; and eventual reunification between Saigon and Hanoi. The following week, the *New York Times* found Rockefeller’s plan to be analogous with “the direction in which U.S. military policy already appears to be moving under General Abrams.”<sup>110</sup> The plan, which alienated the remaining hawks in the party, was intended both as a campaign speech and as a model for the Republican plank on Vietnam. As such, it stood out in mid-July for its specificity and detail.

Indeed, the party’s congressional leadership consciously avoided saying anything inflammatory or controversial about the war or the GOP platform on Vietnam during the weeks preceding the convention.

They sought to prevent an incident akin to Romney's "brainwashing" comment from ruining a show of unity in Miami. For example, during a press conference on foreign relations just two weeks prior to the convention, Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-IL) purposefully neglected to mention the war at all—a fairly glaring oversight to be sure. As Terry Dietz has argued, Dirksen likely wanted to "leave all this [Vietnam] business alone until after the Republican National Convention."<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, questions persisted about the content of the party's platform plank on Vietnam. In the days and weeks leading up to the convention, Republicans of all stripes had expressed their opinions on what the party should stand for (or against) on the war. The Foreign Policy and National Security Sub-Committee of the GOP's platform committee, which was headed by Representative Glenard P. Lipscomb (R-CA), brought a draft plank on Vietnam to the convention. The hawkish document was "somewhat more martial than the Goldwater position of 1964." It indicted the administration for failure in Vietnam, and attributed the debacle to an insufficient effort; it "all but sounded the call for the march on Hanoi."<sup>112</sup> Clearly, the uncompromising and stringent language of the draft plank would have to be changed to more accurately represent mainstream GOP opinion if the party hoped to avoid a repeat of the 1964 fiasco.

These concerns were reflected in a *New York Times* article in late July. Nixon, the paper asserted, did not "want to be saddled with a platform so hawkish that it would permit Vice President Humphrey to outflank him on the left. Without knowing how to achieve it," the article continued, "he is said to want a formulation that would put some distance between the Administration's Vietnam policies and his without at the same time corrupting his own fundamental view that the war has been necessary to resist Communist expansion in Asia."<sup>113</sup> Concerned indeed. In fact, Nixon flew to Los Angeles on July 21, ostensibly to work on his acceptance speech, but his real reason for seeking solitude back home was to work on the Vietnam plank for the convention. Since the party—and, more importantly, Nixon as the candidate—would clearly have to say something specific in the platform, Nixon needed to stake out his position. Would he end the war by winning it militarily or by withdrawing?<sup>114</sup>

Others would weigh in on the nature of the platform as well. Although no longer a candidate for the nomination, George Romney remained an important figure on the platform committee, and he made

every effort to influence the Vietnam plank. He told the committee that the platform “must contain three basic elements. First, it must clearly set forth our aim in Vietnam. Second, it must present a conflict strategy to achieve that aim. Third, it must include a positive program for peace.” If the plank resorted to vague generalizations, he argued, or if the GOP were to “pussyfoot or mince words on the Vietnam War issue, the American people will not turn to us for leadership, nor will we deserve it.” Romney again proposed Vietnamization and guaranteed neutralization of Southeast Asia in concert with cooperative multilateral action as a substitute for the unilateral U.S. military action in South Vietnam and the basis for a GOP pledge for an honorable peace in Vietnam.<sup>115</sup>

Even as the convention began, the party remained divided on the direction of its policy. Nixon said that “the United States must seek a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam war but must prepare for new military and diplomatic approaches if the Paris Vietnam peace talks fail ... the present need is for ‘a dramatic escalation of our efforts on the economic, political, diplomatic, and psychological fronts.’” Former president Dwight Eisenhower, still an unapologetic hawk on the war, told the party not to recommend anything approaching a camouflaged surrender. Meanwhile, New York mayor John Lindsay—an outspoken opponent of the war—said the party “‘should assume forthright leadership for the cause of ending this unwanted war.’”<sup>116</sup> These disparate views on the war made a compromise on Vietnam difficult, but agreement was mandatory for the party’s unity.

Fortunately for the party, the extremism and ideological rigidity that suffused the 1964 convention and undermined Goldwater’s campaign gave way to concessions by all sides. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported the following day that “The Republican platform committee appears likely to hammer out a ‘peace plank’ most any GOP candidate could walk .... Despite some differences on the two major issues—Vietnam and the cities—there were indications the 1968 platform would produce no major battle on the convention floor.”<sup>117</sup> The differences in the party over Vietnam were real and nearly insurmountable. However, the desire for unity and the GOP’s institutional memory of 1964 was powerful enough to restrain the objections of even the most vocal hawks and the most committed doves.

The platform which came out of the GOP convention was “a masterpiece of political carpentry,” taking the middle course between conservatives and liberals in domestic policy and between hawks

and doves on Vietnam. The last draft prior to printing literally had numbered sentences and paragraphs highlighted by word and phrase with indications of where each section originated.<sup>118</sup> While ideologically correct for either Nixon or Rockefeller, it tended to be left of the positions advocated by Reagan throughout the past year. Nevertheless, its language was flexible enough to avoid offending the broad center of political opinion in the country and leaving Nixon free to adopt and pursue any course of negotiations to achieve peace. The Vietnam plank advocated a progressive Vietnamization of the war but said nothing regarding a bombing pause and a coalition government that would include participation by the National Liberation Front.<sup>119</sup> Best of all, the plank was adopted by the party without a single dissenting vote—a testament to its inclusiveness and the overwhelming desire for unanimity.

The Vietnam portion of Nixon's August 8 acceptance speech was characteristic of his entire campaign for the nomination. He told the assembled delegates that he would make ending the war in Vietnam his first priority upon entering the Oval Office. While commending the "loyal opposition" for its stand on the war and criticizing the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy, Nixon simultaneously pledged peace under his leadership as president. Of course, the speech included phrases designed to appeal to both the hawks and the doves in the party and said little about the specifics of Nixon administration policies—classic Nixonian rhetoric. The result was an uninspiring conclusion to a convention that had achieved its goal: nominating an electable candidate on a platform that could appeal to the broad center of the American electorate. As for Vietnam, the country would have to wait until Nixon assumed the presidency to discover his plan to end the American involvement in the war; unfortunately, that process would be an issue in Nixon's next campaign as well.

Nixon spoke very little about Vietnam during his campaign—although the infamous Chennault affair, which is too lengthy to discuss here, looms as an intriguing sidebar—and managed to defeat Vice President Hubert Humphrey in a race that grew very tight after Humphrey finally broke with the administration's policy on the war at the end of September. Nixon's victory in November, however, did not placate every member of the party. A little over a week after the election, Hatfield and Case questioned the wisdom of Nixon's statement that the president-elect would support Johnson's decisions and carry them forward after the inauguration. While Dirksen and even Aiken spoke out in Nixon's

defense, it was clear that winning the White House had not cured all of the fissures within the GOP over the Vietnam War.<sup>120</sup> Although most members of the GOP were willing to give the new president a grace period to implement his Vietnamization program and “secret plan,” Republican opposition to the Vietnam War continued during the Nixon administration—most vocally from Representative Paul McCloskey of California, an avowed opponent of the war since entering Congress who staged an insurgent challenge for the 1972 nomination—and culminated in the Cooper-Church amendments intended to curb additional American activity in Southeast Asia.

Republican “opposition” to the war therefore takes on multiple facets. As the “loyal opposition,” a large segment of the party stood behind the administration’s policies in Vietnam while arguing about the specifics of that policy. Hawkish members of the party like Nixon, Tower, Eisenhower, and Laird “opposed” the war as it was being fought; they wanted the administration to give the military additional manpower, utilize its airpower more effectively, and allow the military men to run the war. Finally, there were those who “opposed” the war and sought to end it. This group of congressmen and governors, while numerically inferior within their own party, had a considerable influence on the administration and the American public during this period despite the fact that the antiwar faction in the GOP did not manage to successfully nominate one of its own on the 1968 Republican presidential ticket.

Of course, one could legitimately question the motivations of these Republican doves. Did they adopt an anti-war stance out of political expediency (or simply to antagonize the Johnson administration for partisan gain), or did they truly oppose the war and want peace in Southeast Asia? To be sure, a number of Republicans recognized and sought to exploit the political advantages of opposition to the war in 1966 and subsequently, and only a handful supported peace at any price. Yet the opinions expressed by Cooper, Aiken, Hatfield, and other “doves” in the party were sincere, and their support for a negotiated settlement and an end to the fighting was unquestionable. They were undoubtedly motivated by concern over U.S. credibility, the overextension of the containment policy and American resources, or the nature of the conflict in Vietnam; these men were Cold Warriors, not pacifists. Politics creates strange bedfellows, however, and the evidence undeniably supports the argument that regardless of their motivations, the Republican opponents of the war worked in concert with their

Democrat counterparts—most of whom, it should be noted, shared a common ideological approach to U.S. foreign relations with the GOP—to try and bring an end to the conflict. Critics may argue with their reasoning, but their goal was clear.

The Vietnam War has been blamed for the downfall of both Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. To this list we should add George Romney and to a lesser extent Nelson Rockefeller. Indeed, in many ways, Romney and Johnson were alike—both were more experienced and interested in domestic affairs and were dedicated to improving society on all levels. Vietnam prevented them from achieving their grander ambitions. George Romney's failure to win the Republican presidential nomination in 1968 can be traced directly to his failure to appear decisive on the issue of the Vietnam War from 1967–1968 generally and his “brainwashing” comment specifically. Not only did Romney hand his opponents a gold-plated catch phrase with which to attack him, but the American public and the Republican electorate could not conceive of a president who could be misled so easily or admit that he had been deceived so casually.<sup>121</sup> All else being equal in the GOP primaries, the ambiguous position Romney took on Vietnam was no match for Richard Nixon's foreign policy experience, reputation as a staunch anticommunist, and ability to avoid making any definitive statement on the war during the primaries. For his part, Rockefeller's stance on the war (or lack thereof) acted as a millstone around his neck because he failed to have a position on the war until very late in the campaign, and when he finally did speak out, his peace proposal was too specific and failed to include anything for GOP hawks.

In contrast to Romney and Rockefeller, Richard Nixon became a modern-day Delphic Oracle, deftly maneuvering around the Vietnam issue during the primaries and the convention, seeking to be all things to all members of the party. By subtly inferring that he had a strategy to end the conflict—and thanks to unexpected help from the media, which publicized his so-called “secret plan”—while maintaining his reputation as an ardent opponent of communist expansion, Nixon walked the tightrope of opinion within the party without committing himself to a specific stance. As a result, he both won the GOP nomination in Miami and maintained the requisite flexibility on Vietnam that would serve him well in the campaign against Hubert Humphrey in the fall of 1968.

Nixon's success in managing the Vietnam question during 1968 leads one to consider why Romney seemed unable (or unwilling) to deal

with the war during his presidential campaign. As mentioned above, his inexperience in foreign policy matters and lack of preparation left him at a distinct disadvantage relative to Nixon and certainly prevented him from being perceived as an authority on the conflict. Perhaps Romney's piety—he was a devout Mormon—also figured into his obvious confusion on the issue. Could religious conviction have been a factor in Romney's failure to adopt a Nixonesque no comment policy on Vietnam?<sup>122</sup> Perhaps. Did his determination to be candid and forthright with the public, combined with his inexperience in international affairs, make his flailing on Vietnam inevitable? Absolutely. Of course, the conflict in Southeast Asia challenged even the most seasoned politicians, especially as the war dragged on without an end in sight and public opinion began to turn against the administration's policies, but few seemed as lost or perplexed as did Romney, who was forced to confront Vietnam if he harbored any hope of defeating Nixon for the nomination. Had he been able to avoid the issue completely and focus on his domestic policy agenda, or had he come out definitively against the war as did Senator Eugene McCarthy, then perhaps his legacy—if not his political fortunes—may have been different.

John Sherman Cooper and George Aiken, on the other hand, knew precisely where they stood on the war. As one of the earliest, most vocal, and most determined critics of Johnson's Vietnam policies, Cooper should be recognized for his consistent advocacy of negotiations and his persistent questioning of administration policies. Aiken, while receiving more attention for his views and being credited with the "declare victory and go home" solution (which he never actually suggested), similarly has been eclipsed by his Democratic contemporaries like Fulbright and Mansfield despite his efforts to bring about meaningful negotiations so that the United States could return to its most important priority, working to improve the conditions domestically. Along with Case, Hatfield, Javits, Morton, and other doves, Cooper and Aiken deserve to be included in the narrative of opposition to the Vietnam War.

More generally, both the Republican hawks and doves deserve more scholarly notice than they have received to this point in the literature. GOP involvement, initiatives, and influence in making policy in Vietnam is a parallel but by no means less important narrative of the American experience in Vietnam that needs to be integrated into the history of the conflict, as does a better understanding of the importance of

domestic political considerations during the war. Republican criticisms of Kennedy's and Johnson's policies forced a reassessment of their strategy in Southeast Asia. Pressure from hawkish Republicans led Johnson in particular to prosecute the war more vigorously in an attempt to deflect public attention away from GOP criticisms and safeguard domestic priorities. Indeed, as his own party abandoned the administration's policies, Johnson increasingly needed Republican support for his domestic agenda that could only come if he remained steadfast in Vietnam. Yet Republican doves joined Democratic critics to lobby Johnson to negotiate a settlement to the war; the evidence indicates that this pressure helped to restrain Johnson's actions. For this, Cooper, Aiken, and their colleagues in the GOP should be recognized and saluted. Clearly then, Republicans exerted significant influence on America's Vietnam policies.

Furthermore, the weight of historical evidence makes clear that Vietnam was not simply Lyndon Johnson's war. This is not an apology for Johnson. To be sure, Johnson cannot be held blameless by historians of the Vietnam War; his decisions as president and commander-in-chief committed American combat troops to the conflict in Southeast Asia and escalated the fighting despite clear indications that U.S. efforts would be ineffective against a determined and patient enemy. Yet within the administration, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, and others must bear their share of responsibility for the roles they played during America's longest war. Moreover, the Republican Party should bear a measure of responsibility for the Vietnam debacle despite the fact they did not have direct access to decision-making positions prior to 1969. The American commitment to the fledgling regime in Saigon began under a Republican administration. Throughout the 1960s, the hawkish public statements of Nixon, Dwight Eisenhower, Barry Goldwater, John Tower, and others placed the Democratic administrations in a political dilemma: maintain (or even escalate) the commitment to Saigon or face the unpalatable prospect of "losing" Vietnam and contend with searing GOP criticism reminiscent of the "Who lost China?" debate.<sup>123</sup> And even when Nixon ultimately assumed the presidency in 1969, it would still be another four years until the Paris peace accords were concluded. The American experience in Vietnam was long and complex; to make Lyndon Johnson accountable for all of the errors in judgment and policy that occurred over 25 years is unfair and distorts the historical record. In short, Vietnam was America's war.

## NOTES

The author would like to thank Jeff Livingston, Fred Logevall, Ken Osgood, Kathryn Statler, and the anonymous reviewers for *Peace & Change* for their insightful comments on previous versions of this article.

1. Robert Allen Rutland, *The Republicans: From Lincoln to Bush* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 224–225. These fears would be justified, especially after the escalation of the conflict in July 1965.

2. Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).

3. Remarkably, the story of the Republican doves remains absent from the literature. For a brief look at Cooper's dissent, see Fredrik Logevall, "A Delicate Balance: John Sherman Cooper and Republican Opposition to the Vietnam War," in *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent*, ed. Randall Bennett Woods (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 237–258, based on research conducted by the author. On the emerging Republican dissent, see William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part IV: July 1965–January 1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 800 (hereafter Gibbons, volume: page); and Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138–143. On the politics of the war, see also Melvin Small, *At the Water's Edge: American Politics and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005); and Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

4. *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decisionmaking in Vietnam* (Senator Gravel edition), 4 vols. (Boston, 1971): 3:42.

5. The only significant scholarly works on Cooper's life are a very brief biography, Robert Schulman, *John Sherman Cooper: The Global Kentuckian* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1976); and Logevall, "A Delicate Balance."

6. As American involvement in South Vietnam grew during the Kennedy administration, Cooper became steadily more concerned about the prospects there—about the chances of defeating the insurgency and the likelihood of getting a Saigon government possessing decent popular support. He supported the policy of providing aid and assistance to the Saigon government, but as tensions mounted following the November 1963 assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, Cooper grew more concerned, especially after reports reached Washington that most South Vietnamese were tired of the fighting and wanted to reach a settlement.

7. Cooper comments on WAVE-TV in Louisville, May 24, 1964, Senatorial Series II, box 570, John Sherman Cooper Papers, Modern Political Archives, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky (hereafter MPA/UK).

8. Telephone transcripts from the Johnson White House clearly demonstrate the administration's domestic political focus, particularly Johnson's obsession with the November elections, and its influence on foreign policy decision-making.

9. Transcript, Michael Forrestal Oral History Interview, 3 November 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, LBJL. See also Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York, 1976), 197–198; and Vaughan Davis Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1983), 71. A note in the papers of Johnson's military aide, Major General Chester V. Clifton, dated March 5 and written on White House letterhead, indicated that there should be "No joint resolution of Congress" regarding Vietnam and that no steps should be taken "that would lead us to a Korea situation before November." See Note, March 5, 1964, NSF, Files of C.V. Clifton, box 1–3, LBJL.

10. The argument made by Tom Wicker and others that Johnson kept the congressional resolution in his coat pocket for use in the event of a crisis like the Gulf of Tonkin incidents does not stand up to the evidence. The resolution presented to Congress in August 1964 owed more to prior joint resolutions than to the drafts that had been created during the first half of the year. See Andrew L. Johns, "Opening Pandora's Box: The Genesis and Evolution of the 1964 Congressional Resolution on Vietnam," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 6/2–3 (Summer–Fall 1997): 175–206. Edwin E. Moïse has convincingly argued that while the first attack on American naval vessels in the Tonkin Gulf did occur, the second most likely did not; Moïse also refutes charges of a conspiracy on the part of the administration. See Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

11. News clipping, *Burlington Free Press*, August 7, 1964, 39/3/9, George D. Aiken Papers, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT (hereafter BHL/UV).

12. Gibbons, II: 266.

13. *Congressional Record*, vol. 110, p. 17833.

14. Gibbons, II: 325–326.

15. *New York Times*, January 7, 1965.

16. Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 309.

17. Mark Stoler, "The 'Wise Old Owl': George D. Aiken and Foreign Affairs, 1941–1975," in *The Political Legacy of George D. Aiken: Wise Old Owl of the U.S. Senate*, ed. Michael Sherman (Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, Inc., 1995): 105.

18. Letter, Aiken to John Wires, December 26, 1964, 39/3/8, Aiken Papers, BHL/UV.

19. Republican critics from across the spectrum on Vietnam assaulted the administration for failing to keep both Congress and the American people informed about the progress of the war, some going so far as to accuse Johnson and McNamara (in particular) of outright deceit. See for example Speech, Case on the Senate floor, August 11, 1967, 34/92-M, Clifford M. Case Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

20. Transcript, Aiken interview on WCAX-TV, March 10, 1965, 51/4/39, Aiken Papers, BHL/UV.

21. *Washington Post*, March 26, 1965.

22. Logevall, *Choosing War*, 400–404. One member of Congress who did not hesitate to criticize the trajectory of the administration's policy was Senator Frank Church (D-ID). See David F. Schmitz and Natalie Rousekis, "Frank Church, the Senate, and the Emergence of Dissent on the Vietnam War," *Pacific Historical Review* 63/4 (November 1994): 561–581. Governor (and later Senator) Mark Hatfield (R-OR) cast the only opposing vote on a resolution in support of Johnson in the wake of the July escalation at a meeting of the National Governor's Conference in Minneapolis. See Mann, 463–464.

23. Cooper released a statement in late December regarding the bombing pause: "The reports of proposals to extend the truce in Vietnam mean that a test is ahead over the willingness of North Vietnam to negotiate.... This will be a decisive period, toward either broad negotiations or a larger extension of the war. The action of the President in suspending the bombing of North Vietnam confirms the willingness of our country to negotiated, and he should be supported." See Statement, December 23, 1965, Press Release Series, box 879, Cooper Papers, MPA/UK.

24. *Washington Post*, January 27, 1966; *Congressional Record* vol. 112, 1246–1247; see also Statement, Cooper, January 10, 1966, Speech Series, box 905, Cooper Papers, MPA/UK.

25. Gibbons, III: 139. On January 30 Cooper appeared on "Opinion in the Capitol" and said, "Distasteful as it is, the Vietcong are the main fighters—they are doing the bulk of the fighting. They are supplied, without question, by North Vietnam, and by both men and supplies and with weapons from China. But they are the backbone of the fighting in Vietnam and if we ever reach negotiations

they will have to be included.” Transcript, January 30, 1966, Speech Series, box 905, Cooper papers, MPA/UK.

26. Gibbons, III: 139.

27. Press release, April 18–22, 1966, Senatorial Series II, box 597, Cooper Papers, MPA/UK.

28. The hearings, which ran from January 28 to February 18, 1966, gave opponents of the war a visible and respectable platform within the political system from which to argue their position. Due to the SFRC’s lack of political influence to sway public opinion or the administration, however, the hearings only had a marginal effect on America’s policy in Vietnam. An edited version of the testimony given at the hearings, including the complete statements of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, George Kennan, and General Maxwell Taylor can be found in *The Vietnam Hearings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); the complete hearings are found in United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, “Supplemental Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Year 1966: Vietnam: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 89th Congress, Second Session” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1966).

29. *Christian Science Monitor*, July 28, 1966.

30. *New York Times*, November 10, 1966.

31. Of the 66 House candidates Nixon campaigned for, 44 won; of the 86 Republican candidates for all offices that he helped, 59 were elected—a success rate of 68.6 percent. See Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1995), 287. Perhaps most importantly, the electoral votes of the states with Republican governors after the 1966 elections now stood at 293, 23 more than required to elect the president in 1968. See Chester et al., *An American Melodrama*, 185.

32. The Republican Coordinating Committee was created as an effort to, in the words of Wisconsin Representative Melvin Laird, “bring people together and to have a discussion so that we could speak more with one voice, and to use our national leadership in a more effective way.’” The membership of the new group included former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, all past presidential candidates, selected governors (including George Romney), and other party officials, but congressional representation was the dominating factor. The Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois and House Minority Leader Gerald Ford of Michigan announced the formation of the coordinating committee on January 11, 1965, saying it would “guide Republican Party Policy at the national level, in the absence of a Republican President and Vice President, by the record they write in the Congress. It is their responsibility.” Quoted in Terry Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961–1968* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 84. On Dirksen, see Byron C. Hulsey, *Everett Dirksen & His Presidents:*

*How a Senate Giant Shaped American Politics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

33. Meeting notes (Rostow), November 15, 1966, National Security File, Files of Walt W. Rostow, box 1, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX (hereafter LBJL).

34. Complicating the situation in Vietnam was that the same Democrats that were opposing the president in Vietnam were supporting his Great Society programs, while many conservatives who supported Johnson's efforts in Southeast Asia argued against increased domestic spending. Thus, Johnson was placed in the precarious and unenviable position of attempting to placate multiple coalitions for multiple (and related) issues. See Gibbons, III: 213.

35. The split in the GOP along hawk-dove lines was perhaps best exemplified with the publication of a dovish Republican policy committee report on Vietnam and the immediate hawkish counterattack led by Senator John Tower, a member of the committee who was not consulted prior to the report's release.

36. Letter to the editor, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, March 31, 1967.

37. Morton defends his decision to break with the administration in Letter, Morton to Weathers, Jr., August 30, 1967, box 22, Morton Papers, MPA/UK.

38. It should be noted that Javits had expressed concerns about the war for some time. A staff memo to George Aiken noted that when "Javits was asked about Viet Nam," the New York Senator replied that "he had had strong misgivings about it but the President's course had to be followed through and he was supporting LBJ right down the line." See Memorandum to Aiken, October 1966, 39/5/18, Aiken Papers, BHL/UV.

39. Jacob Javits, *The Autobiography of a Public Man*, with Steinberg (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 398–399.

40. Statement, Findley in the House, May 18, 1967; and Letter, Findley to Adair, May 31, 1967. Attached to the speech is a copy of the proposed joint resolution, Memos and Statements 7/67, box 81B, E. Ross Adair Papers, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, IN (hereafter ISL).

41. Press release, July 17, 1967, box 81B, Adair Papers, ISL. Morse was joined by John Dellenback of Oregon, Marvin Esch of Michigan, Frank Horton of New York, Charles Mathias, Jr., of Maryland, Charles Mosher of Ohio, Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania, and Robert Stafford of Vermont.

42. Transcript, "Today Show," August 16, 1967, box 31/24, John Tower papers, Special Collections Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX (hereafter Tower Papers).

43. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 15, 1967.

44. Vic Maerki, *Burlington (Vermont) Free Press*, December 3, 1966,

18. Vietnam was the issue that vaulted Nixon back into contention for the

presidency. His attacks on America's Vietnam policy during the mid-1960s did more than place pressure on the Johnson administration to prosecute the war more vigorously. His uncompromising rhetoric during the period from 1964–1967 served to alienate a large segment of the American public and contributed to the inflammatory domestic climate on the war. Ironically, the increased protests and violence against American involvement in the conflict—which Nixon lobbied to escalate—provided him with one of his central themes in the 1968 campaign. Indeed, Nixon's "law and order" platform was instrumental in his victories in the GOP primaries and the general election. For a more in-depth look at Nixon's criticism of the Johnson administration during this period, see Andrew L. Johns, "A Voice from the Wilderness: Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War, 1964–1966," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29/2 (Spring 1999): 317–335.

45. *New York Times*, August 11, 1967. Like Percy, Hatfield had been elected to the Senate in the 1966 midterm elections. On Hatfield's opposition to the war, see for example Mark O. Hatfield, *Against the Grain: Reflections of a Rebel Republican* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2001), esp. 93–104.

46. Quoted in Stoler, 105. Mansfield also labeled UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg an owl, explaining that the owl was a wise man who gave his unswerving support to the administration but also looked ahead. See *Washington Post*, February 1, 1966; and Stoler, 109. On Mansfield, see Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003).

47. Stoler, 108–109. Aiken wrote a constituent in 1967, "Senator Mansfield and I see things very much alike on Viet Nam." See Letter, Aiken to Laina Gerrish, May 4, 1967, 39/4/35, Aiken Papers, UV/BHL.

48. As George Aiken wrote to a constituent, "While I may not be in complete agreement with our policy in Viet Nam, I believe our boys there should have our full support. I have voted for every appropriation requested by the President to keep our forces well supplied." See Letter, Aiken to R.M. Peardon Donaghy, May 8, 1967, 39/4/35, Aiken Papers, BHL/UV.

49. *Washington Post*, March 18, 1967.

50. *New York Times*, September 9, 1967. Romney responded to Smith's statement indirectly: "I think that a Republican candidate in 1968 must have assurance in his own heart and mind ... that he can bring about a sound peace at the earliest possible date." Press conference transcript, September 9, 1967, Gubernatorial series, box 245, Romney papers, BHL/UM. New York mayor John Lindsay agreed, arguing that this would "give the voters an alternative to President Johnson's policy." Lindsay believed that Illinois senator Charles Percy was "the only potential Republican candidate with a consistent position on the

issue that could form the basis of a national campaign." See *New York Times*, October 6, 1967.

51. Quoted in Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 386–387.

52. Letter Roller to Morton, May 2, 1967, National Republican Committee series, Political File—National Campaigns, 1963–1968, box 19, Thruston B. Morton papers, MPA/UK. Roller's letter indicated support of a Rockefeller, Percy, or Romney candidacy in 1968 and noted that there was not much support for unilateral or immediate withdrawal.

53. For an overview of Romney's struggles with the war, see Andrew L. Johns, "Achilles' Heel: The Vietnam War and George Romney's Bid for the Presidency, 1967 to 1968," *The Michigan Historical Review* 26/1 (Spring 2000), 1–29. Romney said in Japan during the trip that "the American presence in Vietnam is necessary, if the world is to maintain liberty and freedom," and gave his full support for the American effort in Vietnam. *Japan Times*, November 4, 1965, clipping in Gubernatorial series, box 129, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

54. Letter, Romney to Eisenhower, November 15, 1965, Gubernatorial series, box 363, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

55. Speech, November 16, 1965, Gubernatorial series, box 246, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

56. *Newsweek*, July 18, 1966, 21; and William V. Shannon, "George Romney: Holy and Hopeful," *Harper's*, February 1967, 61.

57. Interview, Romney on WKBD (Detroit), August 31, 1967, Gubernatorial series, box 245, Romney papers, BHL/UM. The interview with Gordon was taped so that the governor would not have to appear on the program on Sunday, in keeping with his strict religious practices. Columnist William S. White of the *Washington Post* had commented on Romney's increasingly dovish sentiments the previous week, although he believed that the governor's position remained ambiguous and could damage his chances for the nomination. See White, *Washington Post*, August 23, 1967.

58. A week later, Romney stated, "I believe that the full record clearly indicates that there has been a systematic continuation of inaccurate reports, predictions, and withholding information. This has kept the American people from knowing the facts about the Vietnam War and its full impact on our domestic and foreign affairs." See Statement, September 9, 1967, Gubernatorial series, box 245, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

59. Eisenhower told Willard Marriott, "I have personally felt that his 'brain-washing' statement was a mere explosive expression rather than an attack upon others." See Letter, Eisenhower to Marriott, January 3, 1968, Gubernatorial series, box 363, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

60. *St. Albans (Vermont) Messenger*, October 2, 1967.

61. Democratic National Committee Chairman John Bailey sounded a common refrain: “can’t you just see him coming back from a conference with Kosygin yelling that he had been brainwashed by a Russian?” Quoted in *Newsweek*, September 1, 1967, 30.

62. Quoted in Theodore White, *The Making of the President*, 54.

63. Commentary, Eric Sevareid on “Face the Nation,” September 5, 1967, Gubernatorial series, box 266, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

64. *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1967.

65. Dennis Wainstock, *The Turning Point*, 35.

66. *Newsweek* believed that the “monumental gaffe” could take Romney “right out of contention for the Republican Presidential nomination.” See *Newsweek*, September 1, 1967, 30.

67. White, *The Making of the President*, 57–58.

68. See, for example, Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans from 1952 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

69. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 28, 1967. A respected Senator and former head of the Republican National Committee, Morton received some attention as a dark-horse candidate for the GOP nomination in 1968—most notably from his Kentucky colleague Cooper—in the wake of Romney’s statement but decided not to run. Instead, he chose to throw his support behind Rockefeller.

70. Warren Weaver, Jr., *New York Times*, October 6, 1967.

71. *New York Times*, December 16, 1967.

72. For example, GOP Senator Paul Fannin of Arizona argued, “We have nothing to gain—and everything to lose—by fighting a war we ourselves are not prepared to win. A stalemate in Vietnam can only lessen the free world’s resolve to resist the march of communism and tyranny. If we do not honor our commitment to keep people free, we can expect more Vietnams in more areas of the world.” See Speech, January 2, 1968, 90:79/2, Paul Fannin papers, Arizona Historical Foundation, Hayden Library, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.

73. In the address, Johnson stated that the country’s will was being tried and implicitly asserted that Vietnam had put limits on what the country could do at home and abroad. The speech is summarized in Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 513–519.

74. *Grand Rapids (Michigan) Press*, December 22, 1967.

75. In August 1967, Tower stated, “We must win the war against Communist aggression in Vietnam so we can bring American boys home. To do this we must abandon our past policy of ‘gradualism’ and bring unrelenting military

pressure to bear on the enemy, bombing every target of military significance and closing the port of Haiphong.” Interview, *Good Housekeeping*, August 16, 1967, Defense, Foreign Relations, Armed Services Committee Series, 973/8, Tower Papers.

76. *Christian Science Monitor*, January 27, 1968.

77. Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam*, 131.

78. Republican leaders had attempted to persuade Nixon that a “Republican hawk” could not win the presidency. See *National Review*, November 14, 1967.

79. *New York Times*, March 6, 1968.

80. Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 41.

81. Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 43.

82. Richard Whalen, *Catch the Falling Flag: A Republican’s Challenge to His Party* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 135.

83. Herbert Parmet, *Richard Nixon and his America* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1990), 506. The memo was designed as a guide for handling the “secret plan” controversy in March.

84. Letter, Nixon to Eisenhower, March 17, 1968, DDE Post-Presidential papers, Special Name series, box 14, DDEL.

85. *New York Times*, March 21, 1968.

86. *New York Times*, March 22, 1968.

87. In the New Hampshire primary on March 12, Nixon received 84,005 votes; Rockefeller 11,691; Romney, despite having withdrawn, 1,743; Stassen 429; and Reagan (who was not an official candidate) 326. See Wainstock, *The Turning Point*, 45.

88. Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 1968.

89. William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 47–48. Nixon told Safire on March 24, “It would be better for me not to do anything controversial for the time being. I don’t want to get into the crossfire between LBJ and Bobby [Kennedy]—let them hit each other, not me.”

90. Quoted in Whalen, *Catch the Falling Flag*, 137. In discussions with speech writer Richard Whalen, Nixon said, “The military emphasis in Vietnam erodes our credibility everywhere else in the world. We look like a paper tiger.... My utter conviction about this stupid war is that we must restrain China.” *Idem.*, 131.

91. An entire draft of the penultimate version of the speech is found in Whalen, *Catch the Falling Flag*, 283–294; the final draft is excerpted in *idem.*, 138–140.

92. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962–1972* (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 147.

93. *New York Times*, April 2, 1968. Nixon also alluded to his planned statement on the war in his speech. Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey, a vocal dove on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was not as restrained as Nixon. The day after Johnson's address, Case went ahead with a planned speech on the Senate floor in which he severely criticized the administration's Vietnam policies and urged the immediate announcement of a phased withdrawal from the war. See Speech, April 1, 1968, 35/33-N, Case Papers.

94. Quoted in Whalen, *Catch the Falling Flag*, 144; and *New York Times*, June 30, 1968.

95. White, *The Making of the President*, 230.

96. Letter, Rhodes to Norbert J. Shubeck, April 29, 1968, 90:48/5, John J. Rhodes papers, University Archives, Hayden Library, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.

97. *Baltimore Sun*, April 25, 1968.

98. Richard H. Amberg, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 3–4, 1966, 1.

99. Wainstock, *The Turning Point*, 89. Governor John Volpe received 29.5 percent of the vote as a favorite son. Nixon had chosen not to enter all of the state primaries. Ironically, Nixon was the Democratic Party's dream opponent, since they had extensive opposition research on him from both the Eisenhower administration and Nixon's failed electoral campaigns in 1960 and 1962. Democratic strategists could not wait to revive Eisenhower's famous "give me a week and I'll think of something" quote about Nixon's contributions to the administration and other controversial statements which would remind the public who they would be voting for in the election.

100. Letter, Morton to John Yarty, July 17, 1968, KY Misc. File, Morton Papers, MPA/UK. Morton had been a strong supporter of the administration's Vietnam policy until 1967, when he publicly denounced the administration and joined his fellow Kentuckian Cooper as a critic of the war and an advocate of a negotiated withdrawal. He defends this decision in Letter, Morton to Weathers, Jr., August 30, 1967, Legislative File, 1957–1968, box 22, Morton papers, MPA/UK.

101. Statement, Charles Percy, July 25, 1968, National Republican Committee Series, box 20, Political File—National Campaigns: Rockefeller, Morton Papers, MPA/UK. Rockefeller had, by that point, spelled out his position on the war (see below).

102. Press release, Senatorial Series II, 1956–1972, box 567, Legislative File—Reference, Cooper Papers, MPA/UK. Cooper made his comments at a press

conference in support of Rockefeller including Percy, Morton, Senator Jacob Javits of New York, Senator James Pearson of Kansas, Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, and Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania. Other supporters of Rockefeller's candidacy included Representatives Robert Stafford of Vermont and Paul Findley of Illinois.

103. Although Rockefeller spoke out in support of the war and its aims during 1964, he maintained a very noticeable silence on the Vietnam issue during the campaign season in 1967–1968. In the *Washington Post* on April 29, 1968, Evans and Novak titled their column, "Rockefeller's Lack of Leadership Leaves Moderates Floundering," and pointed to Rockefeller's failure to provide a moderate alternative to Nixon on the war.

104. Editorial, *New York Times*, May 2, 1968.

105. The political discourse of the 1960s was replete with references to World War II and the political events leading up to that conflict. In particular, the "Munich syndrome" was used by Nixon, Johnson, and others as a Cold War watch-word for caution and preparedness in dealing with potential communist threats posed by the Soviet Union and its clients. For a penetrating look at the use of the Munich analogy, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). See also Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

106. Speech, June 13, 1968, National Republican Committee series, Political File—National Campaigns: Rockefeller, box 20, Morton papers, MPA/UK.

107. Transcript, "Face the Nation," June 16, 1968, Graham T.T. Molitor papers, 28/13, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY (hereafter RAC).

108. Speech, June 20, 1968, Senatorial series II, 1956–1972, Legislative File—Reference, box 567, Cooper papers, MPA/UK.

109. The Machiavellian machinations of Professor Kissinger during the prelude to the 1968 election are truly extraordinary. At various times he provided advice and counsel to the Rockefeller, Romney, and Nixon campaigns, and served for a time as a special emissary for the Johnson administration in negotiations with the North Vietnamese.

110. Editorial, *New York Times*, July 23, 1968.

111. Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam*, 136.

112. White, *The Making of the President*, 245.

113. *New York Times*, July 21, 1968.

114. Ambrose, *The Triumph of a Politician*, 166.

115. Speech, August 1, 1968, Gubernatorial series, box 362, Romney papers, BHL/UM.

116. *Christian Science Monitor*, August 2, 1968. Three days earlier, Lindsay said that the war “has estranged the majority of the American people from their own government. It has reduced our international prestige to the lowest point in modern history. It has endangered our precarious economy, paralyzed our national will and crippled our ability to deal with our most critical domestic problems.” See *Washington Evening Star*, July 31, 1968.

117. *Christian Science Monitor*, August 3, 1968.

118. White, *The Making of the President*, 246. For example, “P” stood for platform draft, “R” for Romney’s suggestions, and “N” for Nixon’s contributions.

119. Wainstock, *The Turning Point*, 101–102.

120. *New York Times*, November 14, 1968.

121. *Newsweek* compared the “brainwashing” comment to the “rum, Romanism and rebellion” slogan that destroyed James G. Blaine’s presidential bid in 1884. See *Newsweek*, September 1, 1967, 30.

122. Ironically, Nixon’s Quaker heritage did not play a role in his astute handling of the Vietnam issue during the 1968 campaign.

123. An early example of Nixon’s hawkishness on Vietnam can be seen in Richard Nixon, “Needed in Vietnam: The Will to Win,” *Reader’s Digest* (August 1964), 37–43. Despite Nixon’s vocal criticism of Johnson’s Vietnam policies during the period from 1964 to 1967, however, he told Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., that he opposed the plans of some Republicans in 1965 to begin referring to Vietnam as “Johnson’s war.” See Memo, Jack Valenti to Lyndon Johnson, June 15, 1965, White House Central File, Name File, box 120, LBJL.