

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

A magazine reporter covered the first American deaths in Vietnam, unaware that the soon-to-explode war would mark America's awakening to maturity.



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FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

BY STANLEY KARNOW

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[http://www.americanheritage.com/
content/first-blood-vietnam](http://www.americanheritage.com/content/first-blood-vietnam)



A Bell UH-1D helicopter climbs skyward after discharging a load of U.S. infantrymen on a search and destroy mission

A MAGAZINE REPORTER COVERED THE FIRST AMERICAN DEATHS IN VIETNAM, UNAWARE THAT THE SOON-TO-EXPLODE WAR WOULD MARK AMERICA'S AWAKENING TO MATURITY

On the evening of July 8, 1959, six of the eight American advisers stationed at a camp serving as the headquarters of a South Vietnamese army division 20 miles northeast of Saigon had settled down after supper in their mess to watch a movie, *The Tattered Dress*, starring Jeanne Crain.

One of them had switched on the lights to change a reel when it happened. Guerrillas poked their weapons through the windows and raked the room with automatic fire—killing Maj. Dale R. Buis, M. Sgt. Chester M. Ovnand, two South Vietnamese guards, and an eight-year-old Vietnamese boy outright.

Buis and Ovnand were not the first U.S. soldiers killed in Vietnam. Lt. Col. A. Peter Dewey of the Office of Strategic Services had been mistakenly gunned down by a Viet Minh band outside Saigon as far back as September 1945. And a daredevil American pilot, Capt. James B. McGovern—nicknamed “Earthquake McGoon” after a character in the Li'l Abner comic strip—crashed to his death while flying supplies to the beleaguered French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. But the two were the first to die during the Vietnam Era, the official U.S. euphemism for a war never formally declared.

At the time, I had just arrived in South Vietnam as chief correspondent for *Time* and *Life* magazines. Insurgents were just emerging to challenge the regime created there five years before, when an international conference held in Geneva had partitioned the country following the French defeat. The term Viet Cong, a pejorative label invented by the South Vietnamese government to brand the rebels as Communists, had not yet been conceived—and they were still known as the Viet Minh, the movement that had vanquished the French. Several hundred American military advisers had been assigned to train and equip the South Vietnamese army, but signs of serious trouble were rare. Then the guerrillas struck that camp near the sleepy town of Bien Hoa. I drove there the next day to gather the details.

My dispatch about the incident at Bien Hoa earned only a modest

amount of space in *Time*—and deserved no more. For nobody could have imagined then that some three million Americans would serve in Vietnam—or that more than 58,000 were to perish in its jungles and rice fields.

Nor did I then, surveying the bullet-pocked villa at Bien Hoa, even remotely envision the holocaust that would devastate Vietnam during the subsequent 16 years of war. More than 4 million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians on both sides—roughly 10 percent of the entire population—were to be killed or wounded. Most of the South Vietnamese dead were interred in family plots. Traveling in the north of the country after the war, I observed neat rows of whitewashed slabs in every village cemetery, each bearing the inscription *Liet si*, “Hero.” But the tombs were empty; the bodies had been bulldozed into mass graves in the south, where they had fallen.

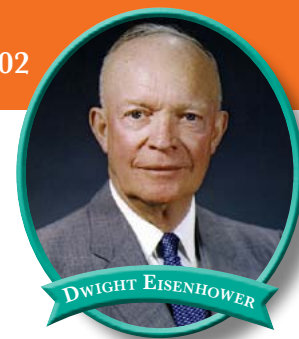
Two decades after Buis and Ovnand died, their names, along with the other 58,000 Americans who lost their lives in Vietnam, were etched on a memorial located within sight of the national monuments to Washington and Lincoln. The memorial, an angle of polished black stone subtly submerged within a gentle slope, is an artistic abstraction. Yet its simplicity dramatizes a grim reality. The names of the dead on the granite record more than lives lost in battle: they represent a sacrifice to a failed crusade, however noble or illusory its motives. In a larger sense they symbolize a faded hope—or perhaps the birth of a new awareness. They bear witness to the end of America's absolute confidence in its moral exclusivity, its military invincibility, its manifest destiny. They are the price, paid in blood and sorrow, for America's awakening to maturity, to the recognition of its limitations. ♦

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

73-THE PRESIDENT'S NEWS CONFERENCE APRIL 7, 1954

President Eisenhower Articulates the "Domino Theory"

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10202>



Q. Robert Richards, *Copley Press*: Mr. President, would you mind commenting on the strategic importance of Indochina to the free world? I think there has been, across the country, some lack of understanding on just what it means to us.

THE PRESIDENT. You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things.

First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs. [383]

Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

Now, with respect to the first one, two of the items from this particular area that the world uses are tin and tungsten. They are very important. There are others, of course, the rubber plantations and so on.

Then with respect to more people passing under this domination, Asia, after all, has already lost some 450

million of its peoples to the Communist dictatorship, and we simply can't afford greater losses.

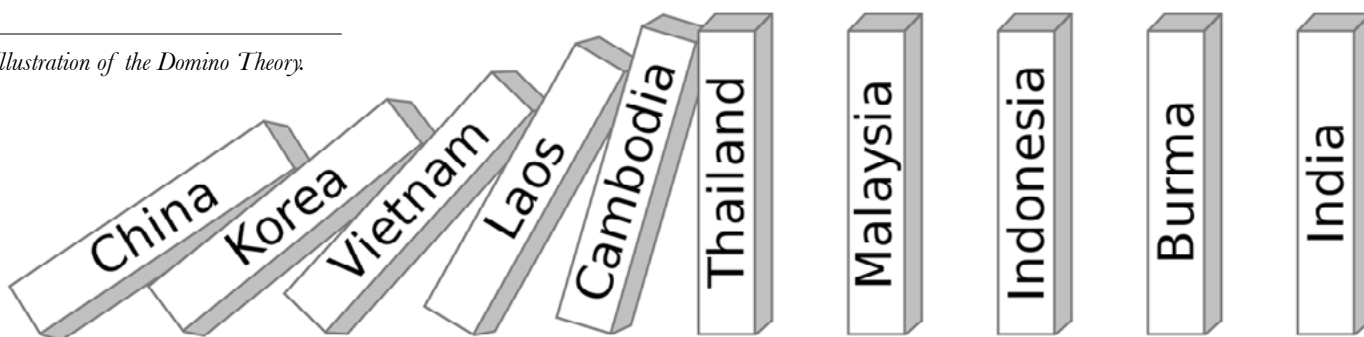
But when we come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people.

Finally, the geographical position achieved thereby does many things. It turns the so-called island defensive chain of Japan, Formosa, of the Philippines and to the southward; it moves in to threaten Australia and New Zealand.

It takes away, in its economic aspects, that region that Japan must have as a trading area or Japan, in turn, will have only one place in the world to go--that is, toward the Communist areas in order to live.

So, the possible consequences of the loss are just incalculable to the free world. ♦

Illustration of the Domino Theory.



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FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, as introduced, S.J. Res. 189, August 5, 1964

<http://research.archives.gov/description/2127364>

On the evening of August 4, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson addressed the nation in a televised speech in which he stated that U.S. ships had been attacked twice in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin near North Vietnam. The following morning, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was introduced in the Senate. Although the version shown here is the original draft resolution, the language was not amended and therefore reads the same as the final version that was signed into law August 7, 1964.



The Gulf of Tonkin

TRANSCRIPT • TRANSCRIPT • TRANSCRIPT • TRANSCRIPT

Joint Resolution

To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attackers are part of deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these people should be left in peace to work out their destinies in their own way: Now, therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America

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

Section 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

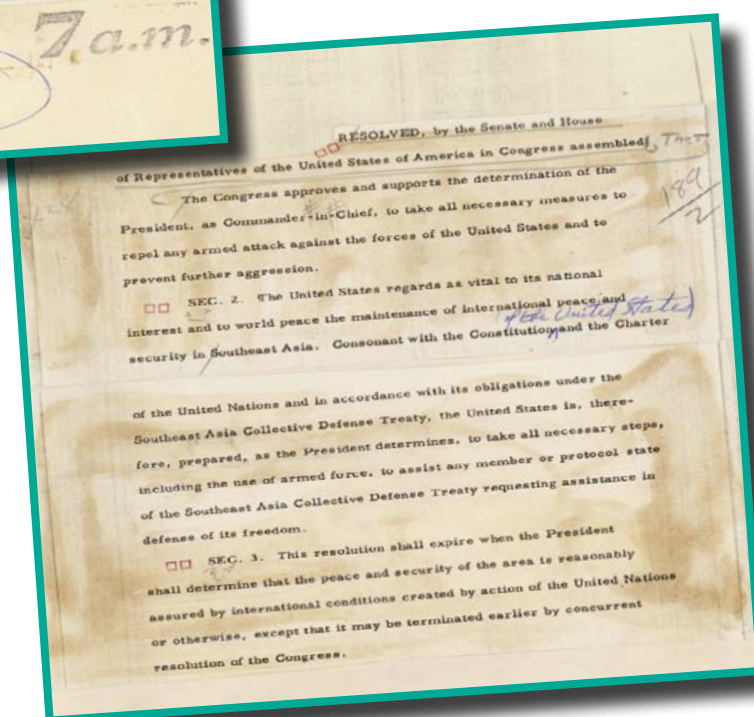
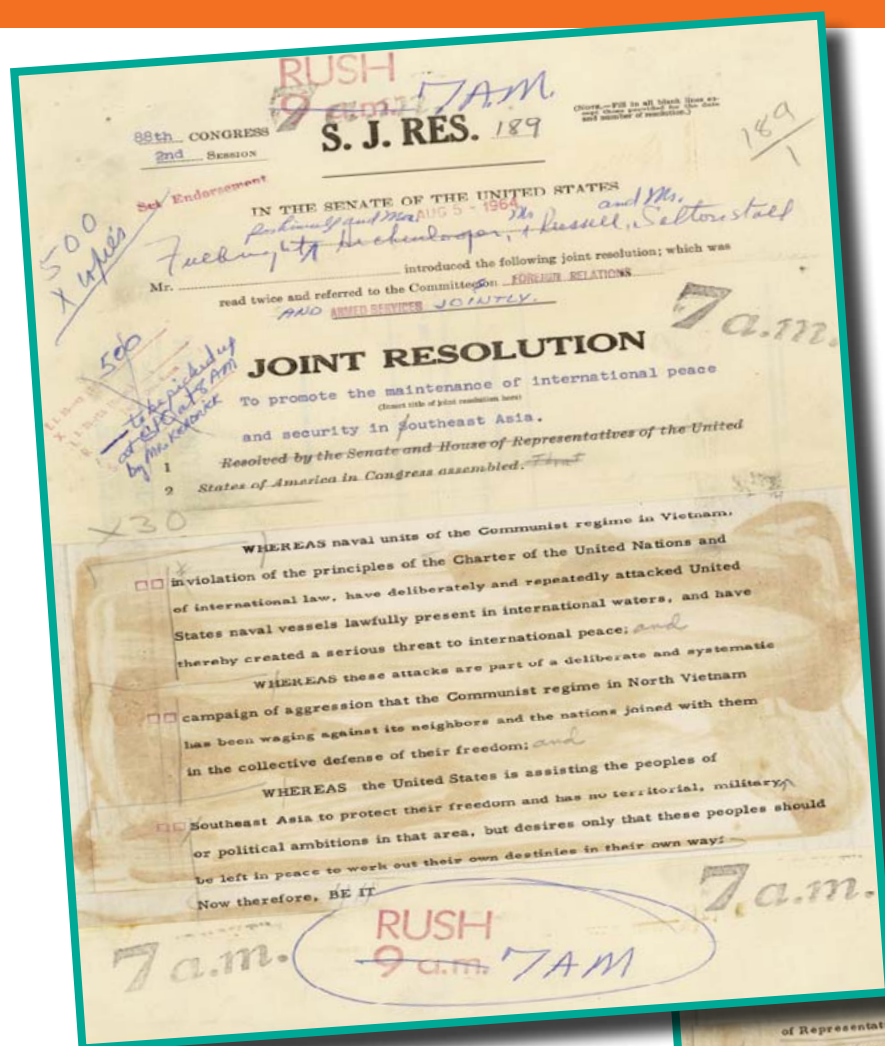
Section 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

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Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, as introduced, S.J. Res. 189, August 5, 1964

– CONTINUED –

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,
original documents shown here.



FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Cutting Our Losses in South Viet-nam

by George Ball

1965

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/cutting-our-losses-in-south-viet-nam/>

Summary

This paper, written on the premise that we are losing the war in Viet-Nam, advances and supports the following propositions:

1. We cannot achieve our political objectives by expanding the bombing of North Viet-Nam. On the contrary, extending the geographical scope of our bombing will pose grave dangers of involving both Red China and the Soviet Union while isolating the United States from its friends and allies.
2. There is no assurance that we can achieve our objectives by substantially expanding American forces in South Viet-Nam and committing them to direct combat. On the contrary, we would run grave risks of bogging down an indeterminate number of American troops in a protracted and bloody conflict of uncertain outcome. This risk is so great, in fact, that those who advocate this course must sustain the burden of proof that commitment of American forces to combat will assure our objectives at an acceptable cost.
3. Combining expanded air attacks in the North with increased troop commitments in the South will not achieve the desired objective. The whole is not greater than the sum of its parts.
4. Since the measures discussed in paragraphs 1 and 2 above offer no assurance that we can win the war by substantially greater US commitments, we should undertake either to extricate ourselves or to reduce our defense perimeters in South Viet-Nam to accord with the capabilities of a limited US deployment.
5. This is our last clear chance to make this decision. If we go forward with Phase III combat, even at the present level of troop deployment, a substantial number



Scene of Viet Cong terrorist bombing in Saigon, Republic of Vietnam. Wikipedia, public domain

of Americans will be killed. This will make it much harder and more costly to extricate ourselves or reduce our commitments. We should, therefore, revise current orders to return to Phase II and we should maintain our present levels of deployment while we seek to get out of the quagmire and cut our losses.

6. By pursuing a systematic and careful plan for cutting our losses we should be able to create the conditions under which we can get out of a dangerous situation without excessive loss of American prestige and influence.

How To Think About the Problem

To determine a proper course of action we must balance the risks and costs of a war fought by United States forces against the risks and costs of a carefully organized tactical withdrawal of the United States from South Viet-Nam or a systematic reduction of our territorial commitment to accord with the capabilities of a limited US deployment.

Obviously, if a curtailment of our commitment in South Viet-Nam would place the United States in imminent peril, we would be justified in taking long chances

in pouring troops and equipment into that beleaguered country and in running large risks of escalation.

On the other hand, if we could accomplish such curtailment in a manner that would minimize the costs and dangers to the United States, the indicated formula would be quite different.

The ultimate decision, therefore, involves a hard-nosed judgment as to the relative costs and dangers to America—both short-term and long-term—of these two courses of action.

Plan for Cutting Our Losses

Against the background of these propositions, we propose a plan that should either create the conditions for a systematic US extrication or—less likely—establish a sound basis for our continued involvement at present levels of commitment.

This plan consists of the following elements:

Step 1

The President should make the firm decision that he will not commit United States land forces to combat in South Viet-Nam.

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Cutting Our Losses in South Vietnam

– CONTINUED –

Step 2

We should use every occasion to re-emphasize what has been clear ever since the first Eisenhower letter but has not been recently stated—that our assistance is being provided on two explicit conditions:

- (a) that there is a government genuinely representing the people of South Viet-Nam which continues to ask for our support; and
- (b) that such government maintains an adequate standard of performance, both in the conduct of the war and the making of necessary political, economic and social reforms.

Step 3

1. Since Americans are dying in South Viet-Nam, the United States has both the right and duty to demand of Saigon that it fashion a stable Government of National Union. We should, therefore, make the following demarche not only on General Ky but on the leaders of all principal groups in Saigon—the Catholics, the Buddhists, the Cao Dai, the military, the Dai Viet:

- (a) unless, within a month's time, those leaders are able to put together a Government of National Union under civilian leadership, the United States will have to reconsider the extent of its commitment until such a Government is formed;
- (b) a Government of National Union must have authentic representation of all key ethnic, religious, and regional groups with a commitment to national elections as soon as hostilities cease;
- (c) such a Government must announce and begin to implement a broad program of political, social and economic reforms, including a cancellation of all peasant debts, land reform, seed and fertilizer programs, etc.
- (d) the Government must announce the essentials of the Acheson Plan—

including a major amnesty effort—in order to attract and protect defectors from the Viet Cong so as to provide a sound intelligence base for our military operations and a transition to a post-hostility reconstruction of South Viet-Nam as a national entity.

The ability of the Saigon Government to accomplish these objectives is not dependent on the course of the war. If there is to be genuine unity, it can come about regardless of whether the ARVN is winning or merely holding its own during the rainy season. In fact, the worse the war, the greater the crisis that should instill a willingness to abandon internecine strife and unite against the common enemy. If no such willingness prevails in Saigon, we cannot take over the war ourselves.

Step 4

If the leaders of the various factions in Saigon prove unwilling or unable to put aside petty factional jealousies and comply with the US demarche we must be prepared to follow through. We must be prepared to advise the Ky Government—or whatever government may then be in

power—that we cannot maintain even the present level of our assistance.

It is more than likely that a notice of this kind from the United States Government would have the effect of either

- (a) inducing the Ky Government to adopt an extreme nationalist position and announce it would go it alone without United States help; or
- (b) bring about the fall of the Ky Government in favor of a government prepared to try to find a political solution with the Viet Cong.

In either event, we would not expect that American forces would leave quickly. Rather we would expect a protracted discussion between US representatives and representatives of the various Vietnamese factions.

Should Ky or his successor demand the immediate removal of US forces from South Viet-Nam, he would almost certainly be ousted by more moderate elements. Even if those elements were neutralist, they would still tend to regard our presence for a period of time as essential to prolonged bargaining with the Viet Cong and Hanoi. Our willingness to



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Cutting Our Losses in South Viet-nam

- CONTINUED -

cooperate in this negotiating phase could permit us to remain in South Viet-Nam for a considerable period and thus avoid any public appearance of a precipitate and undignified withdrawal.

We could use this interval profitably to establish the justice and wisdom of our position with our friends and allies. We could also undertake the necessary diplomatic and economic actions in Thailand and Laos designed to offset so far as possible the immediate shock of the developments in South Viet-Nam.

Defensive and Affirmative Actions

In our anxiety to build up support for the struggle in South Viet-Nam, we have tended to exaggerate the consequences for US power and prestige of a tactical withdrawal from South Viet-Nam. Admittedly, such a withdrawal would create short-term problems, especially in Thailand, but by taking prompt and effective defensive and affirmative measures we should be able to avoid any serious long-

term consequences. By and large, the world knows that the government in Saigon is a joke, and if our withdrawal resulted from an effort to face this problem squarely, friendly nations would not interpret it as a US failure to keep its commitments. More likely most nations would consider that we had more than kept our commitments to Viet-Nam—and that our decision to force the issue of stability was a mark of prudence and maturity.

The following memorandum contains a discussion of some of the measures which should be taken to avoid damage to our position in specific countries and areas.

Renvoi

The position taken in this memorandum does not suggest that the United States should abdicate

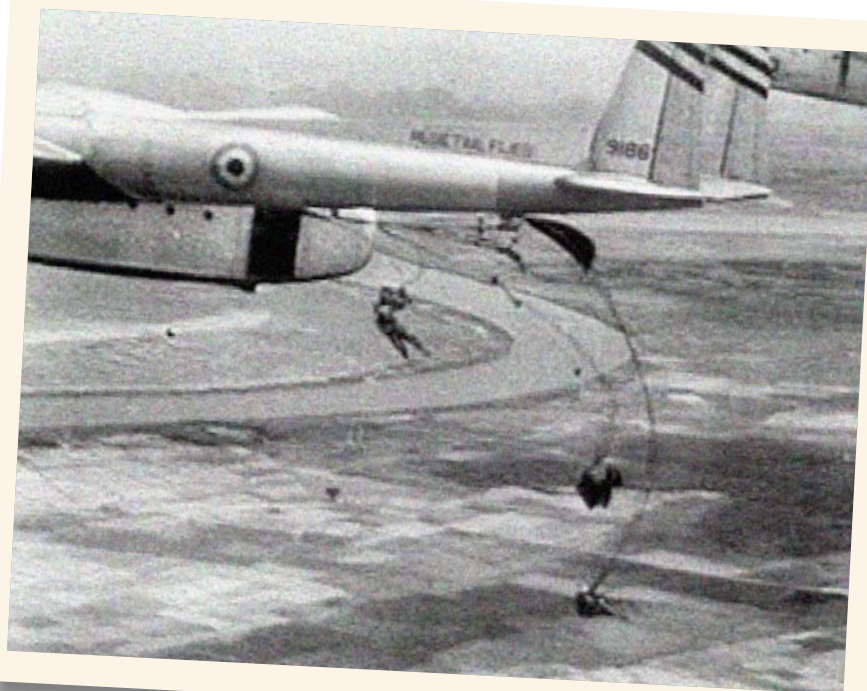
leadership in the cold war. But any prudent military commander carefully selects the terrain on which to stand and fight, and no great captain has ever been blamed for a successful tactical withdrawal.

From our point of view, the terrain in South Viet-Nam could not be worse. Jungles and rice paddies are not designed for modern arms and, from a military point of view, this is clearly what General de Gaulle described to me as a “rotten country”.

Politically, South Viet-Nam is a lost cause. The country is bled white from twenty years of war and the people are sick of it. The Viet Cong—as is shown by the Rand Corporation Motivation and Morale Study—are deeply committed.

Hanoi has a Government and a purpose and a discipline. The “government” in Saigon is a travesty. In a very real sense, South Viet-Nam is a country with an army and no government.

In my view, a deep commitment of United States forces in a land war in South Viet-Nam would be a catastrophic error. If ever there was an occasion for a tactical withdrawal, this is it. ♦



FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Uncle Sam Carrying an M-16 Rifle

by Herb Block

<http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/enduringoutrage/war/exhibitobjects/americanadoubt.aspx>

Among his many cartoons about the Vietnam War (1965-1973), Herb Block drew this symbolic warning about the United States being in over its head during the Tet Offensive. North Vietnamese forces made their bold assault in late January of 1968 with the aim of toppling the Saigon government and obliterating U.S. hopes in the region. The Tet Offensive did not prove decisive militarily, but it added to American doubt about the war. Shown here is a larger-than-life Uncle Sam, hoisting his rifle aloft and slipping into the morass of southeast Asia. The face of Block's Uncle Sam embodied the American anxiety and ambivalence about the Johnson administration's war policies.

Uncle Sam carrying an M-16 rifle.
Published in *The Washington Post*, January 28, 1968.



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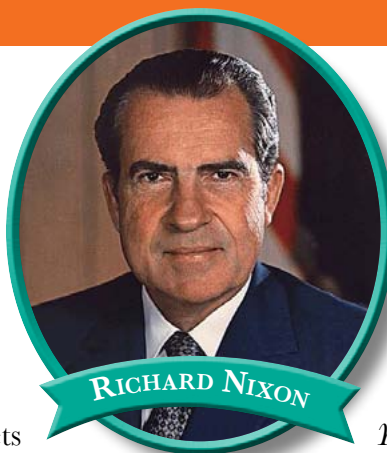
Nixon's "Silent Majority" or "Vietnamization" Speech

Nov 3, 1969

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/hardhats/silent.html>

Full text of speech: <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc14.html>

During his successful campaign for the Presidency in 1968, Richard Nixon promised he had a "secret plan" to end the war in Vietnam. Yet the President decided early in his administration that a quick withdrawal "would result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership...A nation cannot remain great if it betrays its allies and lets down its friends."



Many Americans were unhappy when an end to the war did not materialize. In October 1969, protesters staged a huge rally in Washington, D.C. On November 3, the nation eagerly tuned in to a major Nixon television address on Vietnam policy.

Instead of announcing the end to the war that he had promised in the campaign, Nixon outlined his policy of "Vietnamization," which provided for American troop reductions but a continuation of fighting. He repeated what he had argued before: the United States had to achieve "peace with honor" and to avoid an overly sudden withdrawal.

At the end of the speech, he called for the "great silent majority" to support him in this goal.

The Aftermath of the Speech

Polls appeared to indicate that a "silent majority" sided with Nixon. The day after the speech, as supportive

telegrams and letters streamed in to the White House, an administration official clarified Nixon's concept of "silent majority": a "large and normally undemonstrative cross section of the country that until last night refrained from articulating its opinions on the war." (quoted in the *New York Times*, November 5, 1969)

Opponents of the war responded on November 15 with "Moratorium Day": 500,000 protesters gathered at the Washington Monument. Nixon was so confident the nation was behind him that he informed the press he was watching a football game as the rally unfolded. Positive public reaction to the "silent majority" speech had boosted his confidence. He pledged to continue the war and declared he would not permit U.S. policy to be "dictated" by a minority staging "demonstrations in the streets."

Nixon's continuation of the war resulted in the invasion of Cambodia in April, 1970 -- and a far greater number of "demonstrations in the streets" than he could have imagined. ♦

Full Speech
Text
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FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Nixon's "Silent Majority" or "Vietnamization" Speech

– CONTINUED –

Good evening, my fellow Americans:

Tonight I want to talk to you on a subject of deep concern to all Americans and to many people in all parts of the world the war in Vietnam.

I believe that one of the reasons for the deep division about Vietnam is that many Americans have lost confidence in what their Government has told them about our policy. The American people cannot and should not be asked to support a policy which involves the overriding issues of war and peace unless they know the truth about that policy.

Tonight, therefore, I would like to answer some of the questions that I know are on the minds of many of you listening to me.

How and why did America get involved in Vietnam in the first place?

How has this administration changed the policy of the previous administration?

What has really happened in the negotiations in Paris and on the battle-front in Vietnam?

What choices do we have if we are to end the war?

What are the prospects for peace?

Now, let me begin by describing the situation I found when I was inaugurated on January 20.

-The war had been going on for 4 years.

-31,000 Americans had been killed in action.

-The training program for the South Vietnamese was behind schedule.

-540,000 Americans were in Vietnam with no plans to reduce the number.

-No progress had been made at the negotiations in Paris and the United States had not put forth a comprehensive peace proposal.

-The war was causing deep division at home and criticism from many of our friends as well as our enemies abroad.

In view of these circumstances there were some who urged that I end the war at once by ordering the immediate withdrawal of all American forces.

From a political standpoint this would have been a popular and easy course to follow. After all, we became involved in the war while my predecessor was in office. I could blame the defeat which would be the result of my action on him and come out as the peacemaker. Some put it to me quite bluntly: This was the only way to avoid allowing Johnson's war to become Nixon's war.

But I had a greater obligation than to think only of the years of my administration and of the next election. I had to think of the effect of my decision on the next generation and on the future of peace and freedom in America and in the world.

Let us all understand that the question before us is not whether some Americans are for peace and some Americans are against peace. The question at issue is not whether Johnson's war becomes Nixon's war.

The great question is: How can we win America's peace?

Well, let us turn now to the fundamental issue. Why and how did the United States become involved in Vietnam in the first place?

Fifteen years ago North Vietnam, with the logistical support of Communist China and the Soviet Union, launched a campaign to impose a Communist government on South Vietnam by instigating and supporting a revolution.

In response to the request of the Government of South Vietnam, President Eisenhower sent economic aid and military equipment to assist the people of South Vietnam in their efforts to prevent a Communist takeover. Seven years ago, President Kennedy sent 16,000 military personnel to Vietnam as combat advisers. Four years ago, President Johnson sent American combat forces to South Vietnam.

Now, many believe that President Johnson's decision to send American combat forces to South Vietnam was wrong. Any many others I among them have been strongly critical of the way the war has been conducted.

But the question facing us today is: Now that we are in the war, what is the best way to end it?

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Nixon's "Silent Majority" or "Vietnamization" Speech

– CONTINUED –

In January I could only conclude that the precipitate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam would be a disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace.

For the South Vietnamese, our precipitate withdrawal would inevitably allow the Communists to repeat the massacres which followed their takeover in the North 15 years before.

-They then murdered more than 50,000 people and hundreds of thousands more died in slave labor camps.

-We saw a prelude of what would happen in South Vietnam when the Communists entered the city of Hue last year. During their brief rule there, there was a bloody reign of terror in which 3,000 civilians were clubbed, shot to death, and buried in mass graves.

-With the sudden collapse of our support, these atrocities of Hue would become the nightmare of the entire nation and particularly for the million and a half Catholic refugees who fled to South Vietnam when the Communists took over in the North.

For the United States, this first defeat in our Nation's history would result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership, not only in Asia but throughout the world.

Three American Presidents have recognized the great stakes involved in Vietnam and understood what had to be done.

In 1963, President Kennedy, with his characteristic eloquence and clarity, said: "... we want to see a stable government there, carrying on a struggle to maintain its national independence.

"We believe strongly in that. We are not going to withdraw from that effort. In my opinion, for us to withdraw from that effort would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam, but Southeast Asia. So we are going to stay there."

President Eisenhower and President Johnson expressed the same conclusion during their terms of office.

For the future of peace, precipitate withdrawal would thus be a disaster of immense magnitude.

-A nation cannot remain great if it betrays its allies and lets down its friends.

-Our defeat and humiliation in South Vietnam without question would promote recklessness in the councils of those great powers who have not yet abandoned their goals of world conquest.

-This would spark violence wherever our commitments help maintain the peace in the Middle East, in Berlin, eventually even in the Western Hemisphere.

Ultimately, this would cost more lives.

It would not bring peace; it would bring more war.

For these reasons, I rejected the recommendation that I should end the war by immediately withdrawing all of our forces. I chose instead to change American policy on both the negotiating front and battlefield....

We Americans are a do-it-yourself people. We are an impatient people.

Instead of teaching someone else to do a job, we like to do it ourselves. And this trait has been carried over into our foreign policy.

In Korea and again in Vietnam, the United States furnished most of the money, most of the arms, and most of the men to help the people of those countries defend their freedom against Communist aggression.

Before any American troops were committed to Vietnam, a leader of another Asian country expressed this opinion to me when I was traveling in Asia as a private citizen. He said: "When you are trying to assist another nation defend its freedom, U.S. policy should be to help them fight the war but not to fight the war for them." ...

Well, in accordance with this wise counsel, I laid down in Guam three principles as guidelines for future American policy toward Asia:

-First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments.

-Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security.

-Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Nixon's "Silent Majority" or "Vietnamization" Speech - CONTINUED -

shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.

After I announced this policy, I found that the leaders of the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, and other nations which might be threatened by Communist aggression, welcomed this new direction in American foreign policy.

The defense of freedom is everybody's business not just America's business. And it is particularly the responsibility of the people whose freedom is threatened. In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace.

The policy of the previous administration not only resulted in our assuming the primary responsibility for fighting the war, but even more significantly did not adequately stress the goal of strengthening the South Vietnamese so that they could defend themselves when we left.

The Vietnamization plan was launched following Secretary Laird's visit to Vietnam in March. Under the plan, I ordered first a substantial increase in the training and equipment of South Vietnamese forces.

-After 5 years of Americans going into Vietnam, we are finally bringing men home. By December 15, over 60,000 men will have been withdrawn from South Vietnam including 20 percent of all of our combat forces.

-The South Vietnamese have continued to gain in strength. As a result they have been able to take over combat responsibilities from our American troops.

Two other significant developments have occurred since this administration took office.

-Enemy infiltration, infiltration which is essential if they are to launch a major attack, over the last 3 months is less than 20 percent of what it was over the same period last year.

-Most important United States casualties have declined during the last 2 months to the lowest point in 3 years.

Let me now turn to our program for the future.

We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in cooperation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all U.S. combat ground forces, and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly scheduled timetable. This withdrawal will be made from strength and not from weakness. As South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.

I have not and do not intend to announce the timetable for our program. And there are obvious reasons for this decision which I am sure you will understand. As I have indicated on several occasions, the rate of withdrawal will depend on developments on three fronts.

One of these is the progress which can be or might be made in the Paris talks. An announcement of a fixed timetable for our withdrawal would completely remove any incentive for the enemy to negotiate an agreement. They would simply wait until our forces had withdrawn and then move in.

The other two factors on which we will base our withdrawal decisions are the level of enemy activity and the progress of the training programs of the South Vietnamese forces. And I am glad to be able to report tonight progress on both of these fronts has been greater than we anticipated when we started the program in June for withdrawal. As a result, our timetable for withdrawal is more optimistic now than when we made our first estimates in June. Now, this clearly demonstrates why it is not wise to be frozen in on a fixed timetable.

We must retain the flexibility to base each withdrawal decision on the situation as it is at the time rather than on estimates that are no longer valid.

Along with this optimistic estimate, I must in all candor leave one note of caution.

If the level of enemy activity significantly increases we might have to adjust our timetable accordingly.

However, I want the record to be completely clear on one point.

At the time of the bombing halt just a year ago, there was some confusion as to whether there was an understanding

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Nixon's "Silent Majority" or "Vietnamization" Speech

– CONTINUED –

on the part of the enemy that if we stopped the bombing of North Vietnam they would stop the shelling of cities in South Vietnam. I want to be sure that there is no misunderstanding on the part of the enemy with regard to our withdrawal program.

We have noted the reduced level of infiltration, the reduction of our casualties, and are basing our withdrawal decisions partially on those factors.

If the level of infiltration or our casualties increase while we are trying to scale down the fighting, it will be the result of a conscious decision by the enemy.

Hanoi could make no greater mistake than to assume that an increase in violence will be to its advantage. If I conclude that increased enemy action jeopardizes our remaining forces in Vietnam, I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation.

This is not a threat. This is a statement of policy, which, as Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces, I am making in meeting my responsibility for the protection of American fighting men wherever they may be.

My fellow Americans, I am sure you can recognize from what I have said that we really only have two choices open to us if we want to end this war. -I can order an immediate, precipitate withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam without regard to the effects of that action.

-Or we can persist in our search for a just peace through a negotiated settlement if possible, or through continued implementation of our plan for Vietnamization if necessary a plan in which we will withdraw all our forces from Vietnam on a schedule in accordance with our program, as the South Vietnamese become strong enough to defend their own freedom.

I have chosen this second course.

It is not the easy way.

It is the right way.

It is a plan which will end the war and serve the cause of peace not just in Vietnam but in the Pacific and in the world.

In speaking of the consequences of a precipitate withdrawal, I mentioned that our allies would lose confidence in America.

Far more dangerous, we would lose confidence in ourselves. Oh, the immediate reaction would be a sense of relief that our men were coming home. But as we saw the consequences of what we had done, inevitable remorse and divisive recrimination would scar our spirit as a people.

We have faced other crises in our history and have become stronger by rejecting the easy way out and taking the right way in meeting our challenges. Our greatness as a nation has been our capacity to do what had to be done when we knew our course was right.

I recognize that some of my fellow citizens disagree with the plan for peace I have chosen. Honest and patriotic Americans have reached different conclusions as to how peace should be achieved.

In San Francisco a few weeks ago, I saw demonstrators carrying signs reading: "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."

Well, one of the strengths of our free society is that any American has a right to reach that conclusion and to advocate that point of view. But as President of the United States, I would be untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this Nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that point of view and who try to impose it on the Nation by mounting demonstrations in the street.

For almost 200 years, the policy of this Nation has been made under our Constitution by those leaders in the Congress and the White House elected by all of the people. If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this Nation has no future as a free society.

And now I would like to address a word, if I may, to the young people of this Nation who are particularly concerned, and I understand why they are concerned, about this war.

I respect your idealism.

I share your concern for peace.

I want peace as much as you do.

There are powerful personal reasons I want to end this war. This week I will have to sign 83 letters to mothers,

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

Nixon's "Silent Majority" or "Vietnamization" Speech – CONTINUED –

fathers, wives, and loved ones of men who have given their lives for America in Vietnam. It is very little satisfaction to me that this is only one-third as many letters as I signed the first week in office. There is nothing I want more than to see the day come when I do not have to write any of those letters.

-I want to end the war to save the lives of those brave young men in Vietnam. -But I want to end it in a way which will increase the chance that their younger brothers and their sons will not have to fight in some future Vietnam someplace in the world.

-And I want to end the war for another reason. I want to end it so that the energy and dedication of you, our young people, now too often directed into bitter hatred against those responsible for the war, can be turned to the great challenges of peace, a better life for all Americans, a better life for all people on this earth.

I have chosen a plan for peace. I believe it will succeed.

If it does succeed, what the critics say now won't matter. If it does not succeed, anything I say then won't matter.

I know it may not be fashionable to speak of patriotism or national destiny these days. But I feel it is appropriate to do so on this occasion. Two hundred years ago this Nation was weak and poor. But even then, America was the hope of millions in the world. Today we have become the strongest and richest nation in the world. And the wheel of destiny has turned so that any hope the world has for the survival of peace and freedom will be determined by whether the American people have the moral stamina and the courage to meet the challenge of free world leadership.

Let historians not record that when America was the most powerful nation in the world we passed on the other side of the road and allowed the last hopes for peace and freedom of millions of people to be suffocated by the forces of totalitarianism.

And so tonight to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans, I ask for your support.

I pledged in my campaign for the Presidency to end the war in a way that we could win the peace. I have initiated a plan of action which will enable me to keep that pledge.

The more support I can have from the American people, the sooner that pledge can be redeemed; for the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate at Paris.

Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.

Fifty years ago, in this room and at this very desk, President Woodrow Wilson spoke words which caught the imagination of a war-weary world. He said: "This is the war to end war." His dream for peace after World War I was shattered on the hard realities of great power politics and Woodrow Wilson died a broken man.

Tonight I do not tell you that the war in Vietnam is the war to end wars. But I do say this: I have initiated a plan which will end this war in a way that will bring us closer to that great goal to which Woodrow Wilson and every American President in our history has been dedicated the goal of a just and lasting peace.

As President I hold the responsibility for choosing the best path to that goal and then leading the Nation along it.

I pledge to you tonight that I shall meet this responsibility with all of the strength and wisdom I can command in accordance with your hopes, mindful of your concerns, sustained by your prayers.

Thank you and goodnight. ♦

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/vietnam-photos/images/sky-trooper.gif>

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/vietnam-photos/images/wounded-comrade.gif>



NAPALM



LEFT: Soldiers carry a wounded comrade through a swampy area, 1969.

RIGHT: A sky trooper from the 1st Cavalry Division keeps track of the time he has left on his "short time" helmet, 1968.



FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

War Powers Resolution

1973 | 93RD CONGRESS

<http://www.archives.gov/legislative/gallery/gallery.html>

The War Powers Resolution was Congress's controversial attempt to define the constitutional separation of the war powers between the executive and legislative branches of the federal government. Passed over President Nixon's veto, the resolution was one of several concurrent struggles (Vietnam Conflict, Watergate) between branches over the balance of power.

TRANSCRIPT:

SHORT TITLE

SECTION 1. This joint resolution may be cited as the "War Powers Resolution".

PURPOSE AND POLICY

SEC. 2. (a) It is the purpose of this joint resolution to fulfill the intent of the framers of the Constitution of the United States and insure that the collective judgement of both the Congress and the President will apply to the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and to the continued use of such forces in hostilities or in such situations.

(b) Under article I, section 8, of the Constitution, it is specifically provided that the Congress shall have the power to make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution, not only its own powers but also all other powers vested by the Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.

(c) The constitutional powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to introduce United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, are exercised only pursuant to (1) a declaration of war, (2) specific statutory authorization, or (3) a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.

CONSULTATION

SEC. 3. The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situation where

imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and after every such introduction shall consult regularly with the Congress until United States Armed Forces are no longer engaged in hostilities or have been removed from such situations.

REPORTING

SEC. 4. (a) In the absence of a declaration of war, in any case in which United States Armed Forces are introduced—

(1) into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances;

(2) into the territory, airspace or waters of a foreign nation, while equipped for combat, except for deployments which relate solely to supply, replacement, repair, or training of such forces; or

(3) in numbers which substantially enlarge United States Armed Forces equipped for combat already located in a foreign nation; the president shall submit within 48 hours to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the President pro tempore of the Senate a report, in writing, setting forth--

(A) the circumstances necessitating the introduction of United States Armed Forces;

(B) the constitutional and legislative authority under which such introduction took place; and

(C) the estimated scope and duration of the hostilities or involvement.

(b) The President shall provide such other information as the Congress may request in the fulfillment of its constitutional responsibilities with respect to committing the Nation to war and to the use of United States Armed Forces abroad

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

War Powers Resolution

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– CONTINUED –

(c) Whenever United States Armed Forces are introduced into hostilities or into any situation described in subsection (a) of this section, the President shall, so long as such armed forces continue to be engaged in such hostilities or situation, report to the Congress periodically on the status of such hostilities or situation as well as on the scope and duration of such hostilities or situation, but in no event shall he report to the Congress less often than once every six months.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

SEC. 5. (a) Each report submitted pursuant to section 4(a)(1) shall be transmitted to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the President pro tempore of the Senate on the same calendar day. Each report so transmitted shall be referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate for appropriate action. If, when the report is transmitted, the Congress has adjourned sine die or has adjourned for any period in excess of three calendar days, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate, if they deem it advisable (or if petitioned by at least 30 percent of the membership of their respective Houses) shall jointly request the President to convene Congress in order that it may consider the report and take appropriate action pursuant to this section.

(b) Within sixty calendar days after a report is submitted or is required to be submitted pursuant to section 4(a)(1), whichever is earlier, the President shall terminate any use of United States Armed Forces with respect to which such report was submitted (or required to be submitted), unless the Congress (1) has declared war or has enacted a specific authorization for such use of United States Armed Forces, (2) has extended by law such sixty-day period, or (3) is physically unable to meet as a result of an armed attack upon the United States. Such sixty-day period shall be extended for not more than an additional thirty days if the President determines and certifies to the Congress in writing that unavoidable military necessity respecting the safety of

United States Armed Forces requires the continued use of such armed forces in the course of bringing about a prompt removal of such forces.

(c) Notwithstanding subsection (b), at any time that United States Armed Forces are engaged in hostilities outside the territory of the United States, its possessions and territories without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President if the Congress so directs by concurrent resolution.

CONGRESSIONAL PRIORITY PROCEDURES FOR JOINT RESOLUTION OR BILL

SEC. 6. (a) Any joint resolution or bill introduced pursuant to section 5(b) at least thirty calendar days before the expiration of the sixty-day period specified in such section shall be referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives or the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, as the case may be, and such committee shall report one such joint resolution or bill, together with its recommendations, not later than twenty-four calendar days before the expiration of the sixty-day period specified in such section, unless such House shall otherwise determine by the yeas and nays.

(b) Any joint resolution or bill so reported shall become the pending business of the House in question (in the case of the Senate the time for debate shall be equally divided between the proponents and the opponents), and shall be voted on within three calendar days thereafter, unless such House shall otherwise determine by yeas and nays.

(c) Such a joint resolution or bill passed by one House shall be referred to the committee of the other House named in subsection (a) and shall be reported out not later than fourteen calendar days before the expiration of the sixty-day period specified in section 5(b). The joint resolution or bill so reported shall become the pending business of the House in question and shall be voted on within three calendar days after it has been reported, unless such House shall otherwise determine by yeas and nays.

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

War Powers Resolution

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– CONTINUED –

(d) In the case of any disagreement between the two Houses of Congress with respect to a joint resolution or bill passed by both Houses, conferees shall be promptly appointed and the committee of conference shall make and file a report with respect to such resolution or bill not later than four calendar days before the expiration of the sixty-day period specified in section 5(b). In the event the conferees are unable to agree within 48 hours, they shall report back to their respective Houses in disagreement. Notwithstanding any rule in either House concerning the printing of conference reports in the Record or concerning any delay in the consideration of such reports, such report shall be acted on by both Houses not later than the expiration of such sixty-day period.

CONGRESSIONAL PRIORITY PROCEDURES FOR CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

SEC. 7. (a) Any concurrent resolution introduced pursuant to section 5(b) at least thirty calendar days before the expiration of the sixty-day period specified in such section shall be referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives or the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, as the case may be, and one such concurrent resolution shall be reported out by such committee together with its recommendations within fifteen calendar days, unless such House shall otherwise determine by the yeas and nays.

(b) Any concurrent resolution so reported shall become the pending business of the House in question (in the case of the Senate the time for debate shall be equally divided between the proponents and the opponents), and shall be voted on within three calendar days thereafter, unless such House shall otherwise determine by yeas and nays.

(c) Such a concurrent resolution passed by one House shall be referred to the committee of the other House named in subsection (a) and shall be reported out by such committee together with its recommendations within fifteen calendar days and shall thereupon become the pending business of such House and shall

be voted on within three calendar days after it has been reported, unless such House shall otherwise determine by yeas and nays.

(d) In the case of any disagreement between the two Houses of Congress with respect to a concurrent resolution passed by both Houses, conferees shall be promptly appointed and the committee of conference shall make and file a report with respect to such concurrent resolution within six calendar days after the legislation is referred to the committee of conference. Notwithstanding any rule in either House concerning the printing of conference reports in the Record or concerning any delay in the consideration of such reports, such report shall be acted on by both Houses not later than six calendar days after the conference report is filed. In the event the conferees are unable to agree within 48 hours, they shall report back to their respective Houses in disagreement.

INTERPRETATION OF JOINT RESOLUTION

SEC. 8. (a) Authority to introduce United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations wherein involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances shall not be inferred--

(1) from any provision of law (whether or not in effect before the date of the enactment of this joint resolution), including any provision contained in any appropriation Act, unless such provision specifically authorizes the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into such situations and stating that it is intended to constitute specific statutory authorization within the meaning of this joint resolution; or

(2) from any treaty heretofore or hereafter ratified unless such treaty is implemented by legislation specifically authorizing the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into such situations and stating that it is intended to constitute specific statutory authorization within the meaning of this joint resolution.

(b) Nothing in this joint resolution shall be construed to require any further specific statutory authorization to permit members of United States Armed Forces to

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War Powers Resolution

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– CONTINUED –

participate jointly with members of the armed forces of one or more foreign countries in the headquarters operations of high-level military commands which were established prior to the date of enactment of this joint resolution and pursuant to the United Nations Charter or any treaty ratified by the United States prior to such date.

(c) For purposes of this joint resolution, the term "introduction of United States Armed Forces" includes the assignment of member of such armed forces to command, coordinate, participate in the movement of, or accompany the regular or irregular military forces of any foreign country or government when such military forces are engaged, or there exists an imminent threat that such forces will become engaged, in hostilities.

(d) Nothing in this joint resolution--

(1) is intended to alter the constitutional authority of the Congress or of the President, or the provision of existing treaties; or

(2) shall be construed as granting any authority to the President with respect to the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations wherein involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances which authority he would not have had in the absence of this joint resolution.

SEPARABILITY CLAUSE

SEC. 9. If any provision of this joint resolution or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the joint resolution and the application of such provision to any other person or circumstance shall not be affected thereby.

EFFECTIVE DATE

SEC. 10. This joint resolution shall take effect on the date of its enactment.

CARL ALBERT

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

JAMES O. EASTLAND

President of the Senate pro tempore.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, U.S., November 7, 1973.

The House of Representatives having proceeded to reconsider the resolution (H. J. Res 542) entitled "Joint resolution concerning the war powers of Congress and the President", returned by the President of the United States with his objections, to the House of Representatives, in which it originated, it was

Resolved, That the said resolution pass, two-thirds of the House of Representatives agreeing to pass the same.

Attest:

W. PAT JENNINGS

Clerk.

I certify that this Joint Resolution originated in the House of Representatives.

W. PAT JENNINGS

Clerk.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES November 7, 1973

The Senate having proceeded to reconsider the joint resolution (H. J. Res. 542) entitled "Joint resolution concerning the war powers of Congress and the President", returned by the President of the United States with his objections to the House of Representatives, in which it originate, it was

Resolved, That the said joint resolution pass, two-thirds of the Senators present having voted in the affirmative.

Attest:

FRANCIS R. VALEO

Secretary.

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

War Powers Resolution

1973 | 93RD CONGRESS

– CONTINUED –

H. J. Res. 542

PUBLIC LAW 93-148

Ninety-third Congress of the United States of America

AT THE FIRST SESSION

*Began and held at the City of Washington on Wednesday, the third day of January,
one thousand nine hundred and seventy-three*

Joint Resolution

Concerning the war powers of Congress and the President.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

BRIEF TITLE

SECTION 1. This joint resolution may be cited as the "War Powers Resolution".

PURPOSE AND POLICY

Sec. 2. (a) It is the purpose of this joint resolution to fulfill the intent of the framers of the Constitution of the United States and insure that the collective judgment of both the Congress and the President will apply to the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and to the continued use of such forces in hostilities or in such situations.

(b) Under article I, section 8, of the Constitution, it is specifically provided that the Congress shall have the power to make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution, not only its own powers but also all other powers vested by the Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.

(c) The constitutional powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to introduce United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, are exercised only pursuant to (1) a declaration of war, (2) specific statutory authorization, or (3) a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.

CONSULTATION

Sec. 3. The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and after every such introduction shall consult regularly with the Congress until United States Armed Forces are no longer engaged in hostilities or have been removed from such situations.

REPORTING

Sec. 4. (a) In the absence of a declaration of war, in any case in which United States Armed Forces are introduced—

(1) into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances;

(2) into the territory, airspace or waters of a foreign nation, while equipped for combat, except for deployments which relate solely to supply, replacement, repair, or training of such forces; or

(3) in numbers which substantially enlarge United States Armed Forces equipped for combat already located in a foreign nation;

[http://www.archives.gov/global-pages/
larger-image.html?i=/legislative/gallery/images/
war-powers-1-1.jpg&c=/legislative/gallery/
images/war-powers-1.caption.html](http://www.archives.gov/global-pages/larger-image.html?i=/legislative/gallery/images/war-powers-1-1.jpg&c=/legislative/gallery/images/war-powers-1.caption.html)

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

War Powers Resolution

1973 | 93RD CONGRESS

– CONTINUED –

H. J. Res. 542—2

the President shall submit within 48 hours to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the President pro tempore of the Senate a report, in writing, setting forth—

(A) the circumstances necessitating the introduction of United States Armed Forces;

(B) the constitutional and legislative authority under which such introduction took place; and

(C) the estimated scope and duration of the hostilities or involvement.

(b) The President shall provide such other information as the Congress may request in the fulfillment of its constitutional responsibilities with respect to committing the Nation to war and to the use of United States Armed Forces abroad.

(c) Whenever United States Armed Forces are introduced into hostilities or into any situation described in subsection (a) of this section, the President shall, so long as such armed forces continue to be engaged in such hostilities or situation, report to the Congress periodically on the status of such hostilities or situation as well as on the scope and duration of such hostilities or situation, but in no event shall he report to the Congress less often than once every six months.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Sec. 5. (a) Each report submitted pursuant to section 4(a)(1) shall be transmitted to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the President pro tempore of the Senate on the same calendar day. Each report so transmitted shall be referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate for appropriate action. If, when the report is transmitted, the Congress has adjourned sine die or has adjourned for any period in excess of three calendar days, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate, if they deem it advisable (or if petitioned by at least 50 percent of the membership of their respective Houses) shall jointly request the President to convene Congress in order that it may consider the report and take appropriate action pursuant to this section.

(b) Within sixty calendar days after a report is submitted or is required to be submitted pursuant to section 4(a)(1), whichever is earlier, the President shall terminate any use of United States Armed Forces with respect to which such report was submitted (or required to be submitted), unless the Congress (1) has declared war or has enacted a specific authorization for such use of United States Armed Forces, (2) has extended by law such sixty-day period, or (3) is physically unable to meet as a result of an armed attack upon the United States. Such sixty-day period shall be extended for not more than an additional thirty days if the President determines and certifies to the Congress in writing that unavoidable military necessity respecting the safety of United States Armed Forces requires the continued use of such armed forces in the course of bringing about a prompt removal of such forces.

(c) Notwithstanding subsection (b), at any time that United States Armed Forces are engaged in hostilities outside the territory of the United States, its possessions and territories without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President if the Congress so directs by concurrent resolution.

<http://www.archives.gov/global-pages/larger-image.html?i=/legislative/gallery/images/war-powers-2-1.jpg&c=/legislative/gallery/images/war-powers-2.caption.html>

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

IRAQ AND VIETNAM: DIFFERENCES, SIMILARITIES, AND INSIGHTS

AUTHORED BY DR. JEFFREY RECORD, DR. W. ANDREW TERRILL

MAY 2004

<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/summary.cfm?q=377>

SUMMARY

Unfolding events in Iraq have prompted some observers to make analogies to the American experience in the Vietnam War. The United States has, they argue, stumbled into another overseas "quagmire" from which there is no easy or cheap exit.

Reasoning by historical analogy is an inherently risky business because no two historical events are completely alike and because policymakers' knowledge and use of history are often distorted by ignorance and political bias. In the case of Iraq and Vietnam, extreme caution should be exercised in comparing two wars so far apart in time, locus, and historical circumstances. In fact, a careful examination of the evidence reveals that the differences between the two conflicts greatly outnumber the similarities. This is especially true in the strategic and military dimensions of the two wars. There is simply no comparison between the strategic environment, the scale of military operations, the scale of losses incurred, the quality of enemy resistance, the role of enemy allies, and the duration of combat.

Such an emphatic judgment, however, may not apply to at least two aspects of the political dimensions of the Iraq and Vietnam wars: attempts at state-building in an alien culture, and sustaining domestic political support in a protracted war against an irregular enemy. It is, of course, far too early to predict whether the United States will accomplish its policy objectives in Iraq and whether public support will stay the course on Iraq. But policymakers should be mindful of the reasons for U.S. failure to create a politically legitimate and militarily viable state in South Vietnam, as well as

for the Johnson and Nixon administrations' failure to sustain sufficient domestic political support for the accomplishment of U.S. political objectives in Indochina. Repetition of those failures in Iraq could have disastrous consequences for U.S. foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

Many of those who questioned the U.S. invasion of Iraq and now doubt the chances of creating a stable and prosperous democracy in that country have invoked America's experience in Vietnam as an analogy. In their view, the United States has yet again stumbled into a foreign quagmire—a protracted and indecisive political and military struggle from which the United States is unlikely to extricate itself absent expenditure of considerable blood and treasure and abandonment of its policy objectives.

Conversely, proponents of the Iraq War and optimists over Iraq's future have dismissed the Vietnam analogy as misleading, even irrelevant. For them, the differences between the two wars vastly outnumber the similarities; the appropriate analogy is not Vietnam, but rather the total destruction of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan and their transformation into democratic allies. Still others believe some elements of Vietnam are present in Iraq—e.g., both wars involved counterinsurgency operations, but not others—e.g., there is no counterpart in the Iraq War to North Vietnam, and that the non-analogous elements dominate.¹

The Vietnam War's entry into the debate over the Iraq War and its aftermath probably was inevitable. The Vietnam

War continues to influence American attitudes toward the use of force overseas, and the analogy of Vietnam has been a staple of critics of U.S. intervention in foreign internal wars since the fall of Saigon in 1975. The Vietnam War was moreover a defining foreign policy event for the generation of political and military leaders now in power. It was also the last major counterinsurgency experience of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, which re-encountered the counterinsurgency mission in Iraq.

Are there instructive comparisons between the U.S. military and political experiences in Vietnam in the 1960s and the challenges it faces in Iraq today? If so, can those comparisons usefully inform current U.S. policy in Iraq? Are there lessons from America's defeat in Vietnam that can be applied to promote U.S. success in Iraq? Indeed, what were the lessons of the Vietnam War?

At first glance the contrasts between the Vietnam and Iraq wars would seem to overwhelm the similarities. To begin with, Vietnam in the 1960s was a country with a long national history and powerful national identity forged by centuries of fierce resistance to foreign rule and domination. The Communists had successfully mobilized that nationalism against the French (as they were subsequently to do against the United States) and had developed a doctrine of protracted irregular warfare that pitted Vietnamese strengths against Western weaknesses. In contrast, Iraq is a relatively young state plagued by ethnic and religious divisions that threaten national unity.

In Vietnam the United States went to war with a pre-Goldwater Nichols

FIRST BLOOD IN VIETNAM

IRAQ AND VIETNAM: DIFFERENCES, SIMILARITIES, AND INSIGHTS

– CONTINUED –

conscript military against a highly experienced, skilled, disciplined, and operationally flexible enemy that enjoyed enormous external material support and considerable international legitimacy. In Iraq, highly-professional U.S. joint forces quickly overwhelmed a politically isolated and militarily incompetent foe. Additionally, whereas in Vietnam the nature of war evolved from an insurgency into a predominantly conventional conflict, in Iraq it moved exactly--and quickly--in the opposite direction, from major conventional combat into an insurgent war.

The nature of insurgent warfare in Vietnam and Iraq also differed. In Vietnam, the Communists waged a classic, peasant-based, centrally directed, three-stage, Maoist model insurgency, culminating in a conventional military victory. The Communists also had a clear and well-publicized political, economic, and social agenda. In Iraq, small, scattered, and disparate groups wage a much smaller-scale war of ambushes, assassinations, car bombings, and sabotage against U.S. and other coalition forces and reconstruction targets, including Iraqis collaborating with coalition forces. Nor do the insurgents have an explicit set of war aims.

U.S. war aims and freedom of military action were also much more limited in Vietnam than they are in Iraq. The United States sought only to defend South Vietnam, not overthrow North Vietnam. American military power in Indochina moreover was checked by the threat of Chinese intervention, and more broadly by the Soviet threat worldwide. Today, the United States enjoys uncontested global military primacy and seeks nothing less than revolutionary regime change in Iraq.

In Vietnam, the United States committed a peak-strength force of over 500,000

troops and withdrew after 8 years of major combat operations that incurred 58,000 American dead and 305,000 wounded.² In Iraq, U.S. forces overwhelmed Iraqi military resistance in 3 weeks and continue to conduct operations against a small and manageable insurgency, all at a cost of gas of mid-April 2004. 685 dead.

From neither a strategic nor an operational standpoint does there appear to be any significant and meaningful comparison between Iraq and Vietnam. The wars and the backdrop of the global distribution of power against which they were waged were as different as night and day.

It is from the political standpoint that Vietnam may harbor some pertinent lessons, or at least warnings, for U.S. policymakers on Iraq. This seems especially the case in the areas of legitimacy and sustainability. The United States is now seeking to do in Iraq what it failed to do in South Vietnam: create and sustain an indigenous government and political order that the Iraqi people will accept as legitimate and successfully fight to defend. The Republic of Vietnam was a Cold War creation of the United States and for its brief and corrupt 20-year history remained utterly dependent for its survival on American military power and economic and technical assistance. As such, it was a politically attractive target to the Communists, who claimed that the regime in Saigon was illegitimate. In the end, there were simply not enough South Vietnamese who were prepared to fight, and if necessary die, to preserve the non-Communist political order as it was then configured.

It did not help, of course, that the United States eventually abandoned South Vietnam to its fate, which brings us to the issue of sustainability. The Communist

strategy of protracted war succeeded in part because it correctly identified the American center of gravity as public opinion. The limited and abstract nature of U.S. objectives in Indochina meant that there were limits to the domestic political sustainability of the American war effort. Over time, the combination of continuing losses of blood and treasure with no apparent definitive policy progress turned public and congressional opinion against the war, at least as it was being conducted. This situation prompted a steady withdrawal of U.S. forces and accession to a negotiated settlement that effectively abandoned South Vietnam to its Communist foe. (The Paris Peace Accord of January 1973 mandated the withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces from South Vietnam, while leaving in place there over 200,000 North Vietnamese Army troops. Under the circumstances, it was unrealistic to expect South Vietnamese forces alone to accomplish what U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had failed to accomplish after 8 years of major combat operations.)

State-building in Iraq is still a work in progress, and it is impossible at this juncture to make conclusive judgments on the domestic political sustainability of U.S. policy in Iraq. Though the United States incurred unexpected casualties and occupation costs in post-Saddam Iraq, they bear no comparison with those of the Vietnam War. On the other hand, by virtue of the Vietnam War (and subsequent failed interventions in Lebanon and Somalia), U.S. public and congressional tolerance levels for protracted, indecisive conflict are not what they were in 1965.

This monograph seeks to identify and examine key comparisons between the challenges the United States faces in Iraq today and those it confronted in Vietnam

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for the purpose of offering historical insights to U.S. policymakers responsible for policy and operations in Iraq. We believe that differences between Iraq and Vietnam can be just as important as similarities in providing policy insights.

The monograph assesses differences and similarities in the following areas: relative U.S. military power; war aims; nature, duration, and scale of the war; U.S. manpower loss rates; the enemy; military operations; pacification; role of indigenous and international allies; challenges of state-building; and challenges of sustaining domestic political support. It ends with conclusions and recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Though policymakers instinctively turn to what they think history teaches about what to do, or not do, in a given foreign policy situation, reasoning by historical analogy is an inherently risky business. No two historical situations are identical, and policymakers' knowledge of history is often poor. Policymakers are, in any event, predisposed to embrace analogies, however faulty, that support preferred policy.¹⁴³ Thus proponents of the Iraq War embraced the Munich analogy (and the success of U.S. state-building in Japan and Germany), whereas opponents of war warned of another Vietnam. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM achieved the 'Munich' objective of eliminating a regime that proponents believed posed a gathering threat to the United States. Yet satisfaction of that objective simply confronted the United States with the unexpectedly costly and difficult challenges of state-building in circumstances of ongoing insurgent violence that some were prepared to label a Vietnam-like quagmire.

2. The decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime cannot be repealed. As in Vietnam in 1965, U.S. power and prestige have been massively committed in Iraq, and it is incumbent upon the United States try its best to leave behind in Iraq a 'better peace' than it found there, even if that means reconsidering some ambitious U.S. objectives in Iraq. What if, for example, the United States is forced to choose between stability and democracy in that volatile country. Many experts believe that genuine democracy lies beyond the power and patience of the United States to create in Iraq. If so, both Americans and Iraqis might have to settle for some form of benign quasi-authoritarian rule along the lines of Kemal Ataturk's Turkey, Anwar Sadat's Egypt, and King Hussein's Jordan, perhaps as a prolonged transition to more representative governance. However, under no circumstances--other than the descent of Iraq into uncontrollable civil war--should the United States abandon Iraq as it did South Vietnam in 1975. Indeed, abandonment would seem a near-guarantee of civil war, which could be a worse state of affairs for the average Iraqi than even the Stalinist tyranny of Saddam Hussein.¹⁴⁶

3. Policymakers must recognize that the differences between Iraq and Vietnam greatly outweigh the similarities, especially in the military dimensions of the two conflicts. That said, it would be a mistake to underestimate Iraqi insurgents as the United States did the Vietnamese Communists in Indochina. After all, the very appearance of an insurgency after the termination of major U.S. combat operations surprised many. Moreover, though the nature, size, and appeal of the Iraqi insurgency bears no comparison to its Vietnamese Communist counterpart

(except in so far as both insurgencies are expressions of irregular warfare), the Iraqi insurgency has so far and with increasing skill attacked targets that are key to Iraq's successful reconstruction. Dismissing the insurgents as 'terrorists' and 'dead-enders' overlooks the potentially dangerous downstream political consequences of establishing a large American force presence in an Arab heartland and attempting to transform Iraq into a pro-Western democracy. It was not expected that the minority Sunni Arab community would welcome a post-Saddam Iraq in which it no longer enjoyed a monopoly of power; but neither was it expected that U.S. postwar policies in Iraq would alienate many Shi'ites-- some of them to the point of armed resistance, raising the prospect of a two-front insurgency.

4. Policymakers must also recognize and understand the two most instructive dimensions of the Vietnam analogy for the current situation in Iraq: the challenges of state-building, and the need to maintain sufficient domestic political support. On these two matters, the lessons of Vietnam need to be studied. State-building in Iraq could fail for the same principal reason it failed in South Vietnam: inability to create a political order commanding popular legitimacy. Nor should open-ended domestic political support be taken for granted. The late President Richard Nixon once remarked: "When a president sends American troops off to war, a hidden timer starts to run. He has a finite period of time to win the war before the people grow weary of it."¹⁴⁷ As of this writing, the U.S. forces have just entered their second year in Iraq. If one were to follow the Vietnam War analogy, U.S. forces are in the spring of 1966--still 2 years away from the Tet Offensive, and almost 7 years away from

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the final U.S. military withdrawal from the conflict. However, the decisionmakers of 1965 could take for granted more sustainable levels of public support precisely because they did not, in contrast to the decisionmakers of 2003, have the cautionary experience of the Vietnam War behind them.

5. Policymakers also should not take for granted the absence of hostile external

state intervention in Iraq. The absence of a North Vietnam analog in Iraq could change, depending on the course of events. For example, Iran, which has strong state and theocratic interests in Iraq that have so far been well-served by the U.S. destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime and the subsequent disorder in Iraq that has tied down U.S. ground forces that might otherwise have been available

to threaten regime change in Teheran, is well-positioned to sponsor accelerated chaos in Iraq.¹⁴⁸ Iran has no interest in the resurrection of a powerful Iraq, and certainly not a democratic, pro-Western Iraq, and it has enough Revolutionary Guards and intelligence operatives to get tens of thousands of Iraqi Shiites on the streets to protest the U.S. occupation.¹⁴⁹ ♦

ENDNOTES

1. Commentary on the Iraq War and its aftermath bulges with favorable and unfavorable references to the Vietnam War analogy. See, for example, Robert L. Bartley, "Iraq: Another Vietnam?" *Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 2003; Elizabeth Becker, "In the Ranks, Similarities Between Vietnam and Iraq," *New York Times*, November 2, 2003; Max Boot, "Forget Vietnam—History Deflates Guerrilla Mystique," *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 2003; Robert J. Caldwell, "Iraq is No Vietnam," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 9, 2003; Hank Cole, "Iraq War Bears Resemblance to U.S. Efforts in Vietnam," *Colorado Springs Gazette*, December 9, 2003; "Facts Fail to Support Iraq-Vietnam Comparisons," *USA Today*, November 7, 2003; Howard Fineman, "Echoes of Vietnam Grow Louder," *Newsweek*, October 29, 2003; David Gelernter, "Don't Quit as We Did in Vietnam," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 2003; David Gergen, "The Fierce Urgency of Iraq," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 13, 2003; Bradley Graham, "Is Iraq Another Vietnam Quagmire?" No and Yes, *Washington Post*, October 5, 2003; Richard Haloran, "Vietnam Syndrome Resurfaces in Iraq," *Honolulu Advertiser*, February 15, 2004; Victor Davis Hanson, "Then and Now," *National Review*, December 8, 2003; Seymour M. Hersh, "Moving Targets," *New Yorker*, December 15, 2003; John Hughes, "Why Iraq is Not Like Vietnam," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 27, 2003; Michael Ignatieff, "The American Empire (Get Used to It)," *New York Times Magazine*, January 5, 2003; Robert G. Kaiser, "Iraq Isn't Vietnam, But They Rhyme," *Washington Post*, December 28, 2003; James Kitfield, "No, It's Not Vietnam," *National Journal*, November 22, 2003; Stanley Karnow, "Do Not Compare Iraq with Vietnam," *Boston Globe*, April 20, 2003; Richard Leiby, "Iraq Vs. Vietnam: The Scorecard," *Washington Post*, March 21, 2004; Gordon Livingston, "Iraq's Chilling Echoes of Vietnam," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 30, 2003; Sandra Mackey, *The Reckoning: Iraq and the Legacy of Saddam Hussein*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2002, p. 396; John Maggs, "Too Much Like Vietnam," *National Journal*, November 22, 2003; Michael Mandelbaum, "Iraq Doesn't Fit Vietnam Picture," *Long Island Newsday*, October 31, 2003; Dave Moniz, "Monthly Costs of Iraq, Afghan Wars Approach that of Vietnam," *USA Today*, September 8, 2003; Dave Moniz, "Some Veterans of Vietnam See Iraq Parallel in Lack of Candor," *USA Today*, November 7, 2003; Walter Pincus, "A Quagmire More Like a Presidential Fixation," *Washington Post*, August 31, 2003; James P. Pinkerton, "Bush's War Strategy Looks Like a Steal of Nixon," *Long Island Newsday*, November 18, 2003; Thomas E. Ricks, "For Vietnam Vet Anthony Zinni, Another War on Shaky Territory," *Washington Post*, December 23, 2003; Thomas E. Ricks, "Marines to offer New Tactics in Iraq," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2004; Sally Satel, "Returning from Iraq, Still Fighting Vietnam," *New York Times*, March 5, 2004; Evan Thomas, Rod Nordlinger, and Christian Caryl, "Operation Hearts and Minds," *Newsweek*, December 29, 2003-January 5, 2004; Mike Turner, "The Only Way Out is Forward," *Newsweek*, September 12, 2003; Craig R. Whitney, "Tunnel Vision: Watching Iraq, and Seeing Vietnam," *New York Times*, November 9, 2003; George C. Wilson, "Beware a Phoenix Rising from Iraq's Ashes," *National Journal*, December 20, 2003; and George C. Wilson, "Iraq is Not Vietnam," *National Journal*, April 12, 2003.

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146. See Anthony Cordesman, "The Facts We Must Face," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2004.

147. Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, New York: Avon Books, 1985, p. 88.

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RL32267—THE WAR POWERS RESOLUTION: AFTER THIRTY YEARS (EXCERPT), MARCH 11, 2004

RICHARD F. GRIMMETT, SPECIALIST IN NATIONAL DEFENSE,
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE, AND TRADE DIVISION

<http://www.fas.org/man/crs/RL32267.html>

SUMMARY

This report discusses and assesses the War Powers Resolution, its application since enactment in 1973, providing detailed background on a variety of cases where it was utilized, or issues of its applicability were raised. It will be revised biannually.

In the post-Cold War world, Presidents have continued to commit U.S. Armed Forces into potential hostilities, sometimes without a specific authorization from Congress. Thus the War Powers Resolution and its purposes continues to be a potential subject of controversy. On June 7, 1995 the House defeated, by a vote of 217-201, an amendment to repeal the central features of the War Powers Resolution that have been deemed unconstitutional by every President since the law's enactment in 1973. In 1999, after the President committed U.S. military forces to action in Yugoslavia without congressional authorization, Rep. Tom Campbell used expedited procedures under the Resolution to force a debate and votes on U.S. military action in Yugoslavia, and later sought, unsuccessfully, through a federal court suit to enforce Presidential compliance with the terms of the War Powers Resolution.

The War Powers Resolution (P.L. 93-148) was passed over the veto of President Nixon on November 7, 1973, to provide procedures for Congress and the President to participate in decisions to send U.S. Armed Forces into hostilities. Section 4(a)(1) requires the President to report to Congress any introduction of U.S. forces into hostilities or imminent hostilities. When such a report is submitted, or is required to be submitted, section 5(b) requires that the use of forces must be terminated within 60 to 90 days unless Congress authorizes such use or extends the time period. Section 3 requires that the "President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing" U.S. Armed Forces into hostilities or imminent hostilities.

From 1975 through 2003, Presidents have submitted 111 reports as the result of the War Powers Resolution, but only one, the 1975 Mayaguez seizure, cited section 4(a)(1) which triggers the time limit, and in this case the military action was completed and U.S. armed forces had disengaged from the area of conflict when the report was made. The reports submitted by the President since enactment of the War Powers Resolution cover a range of military activities from embassy evacuations to full scale combat military operations, such as the Persian Gulf conflict, and the 2003 war with Iraq, the intervention in Kosovo and the anti-terrorism actions in Afghanistan. In some instances U.S. Armed Forces have been used in hostile situations without formal reports to Congress under the War Powers Resolution. On one occasion, Congress exercised its authority to determine that the requirements of section 4(a)(1) became operative on August 29, 1983, through passage of the Multinational Force in Lebanon Resolution (P.L. 98-119). In 1991 and 2002, Congress authorized, by law, the use of military force against Iraq. In several instances neither the President, Congress, nor the courts have been willing to trigger the War Powers Resolution mechanism.

Major Cases and Issues Prior to the Persian Gulf War

- ♦ Vietnam Evacuations and Mayaguez: What Is Consultation?
- ♦ Iran Hostage Rescue Attempt: Is Consultation Always Necessary and Possible?
- ♦ El Salvador: When Are Military Advisers in Imminent Hostilities?
- ♦ Honduras: When Are Military Exercises More than Training?
- ♦ Lebanon: How Can Congress Invoke the War Powers Resolution?
- ♦ Grenada: Do the Expedited Procedures Work?
- ♦ Libya: Should Congress Help Decide on Raids to Undertake in Response to International Terrorism?
- ♦ Persian Gulf, 1987: When Are Hostilities Imminent?
- ♦ Invasion of Panama: Why Was the War Powers Issue Not Raised?

Major Cases and Issues in the Post-Cold War World: United Nations Actions

- ♦ Persian Gulf War, 1991: How Does the War Powers Resolution Relate to the United Nations and a Real War?
- ♦ Iraq-Post Gulf War: How Long Does an Authorization Last?
- ♦ Somalia: When Does Humanitarian Assistance Require Congressional Authorization?
- ♦ Former Yugoslavia/Bosnia/Kosovo: What If No Consensus Exists?
 - Bosnia
 - Kosovo
- ♦ Haiti: Can the President Order Enforcement of a UN Embargo?
- ♦ Terrorist Attacks against the United States (World Trade Center and the Pentagon) 2001: How Does the War Powers Resolution Apply?
- ♦ Use of Force Against Iraq Resolution 2002: A Classic Application of the War Powers Resolution?