

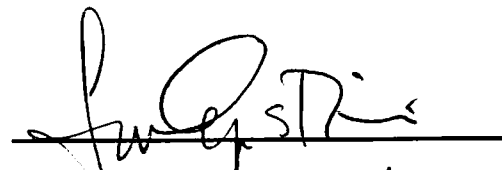
THE CASE FOR LIMITED WAR: LYNDON B. JOHNSON'S VIETNAM
WAR RHETORIC

By
Jonathan Mark White

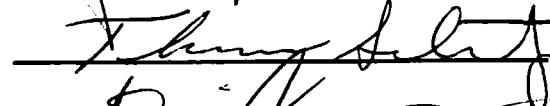
Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in History

April 2007

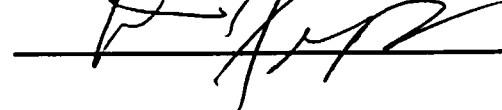
On the basis of this thesis
defended by the candidate on
25 April -07 we, the
undersigned, recommend that the
candidate be awarded
High Honors
in History:



EPSTEIN



SCHWARTZ
(ADVISER)



FERGUS

THE CASE FOR LIMITED WAR: LYNDON B. JOHNSON'S VIETNAM
WAR RHETORIC

By
Jonathan Mark White

Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in History

April 2007

On the basis of this thesis
defended by the candidate on
_____ we, the
undersigned, recommend that the
candidate be awarded

_____ in History:

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Rhetoric of the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis	7
Chapter 2: Minimizing the Escalation. 1965	20
Chapter 3: The Christmas Bombing Pause and the Great Balancing Act of 1966	30
Chapter 4: Protesters, Public Opinion, and Peace	47
Conclusion	70
Bibliography	73

Introduction

This thesis confronts the problem of defending and representing a limited war, as exhibited in the rhetoric of Lyndon B. Johnson during the Vietnam War. When Johnson became President, he inherited a situation in Vietnam defined by the decisions of Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy before him. Johnson, in 1964-1965, escalated the conflict, but many limits remained throughout Johnson's presidency, including a limited objective (to return to the 1954 status quo rather than to invade and conquer North Vietnam), the fear that China or the Soviet Union would become involved, the desire not to strain the improving relations with the Soviet Union, the tension of domestic pressures (for escalation and for withdrawal), and, most importantly, Johnson's attempts to focus public and congressional attention on his Great Society domestic reforms.

Foreign policy was not Johnson's strength. While not a complete stranger to foreign affairs, Johnson had a passion for domestic issues, basing his vision for the Great Society in a series of domestic legislation including civil rights, education reform, Medicare, and dozens of other initiatives. Regarding the political situation in 1965, even Johnson's wife, Ladybird, said: "I just hope that foreign problems do not keep mounting. They do not represent Lyndon's kind of Presidency."¹

Beyond mere disposition, however, political pressures made Vietnam an especially difficult issue. Johnson himself, speaking in 1970 about the escalation in early 1965, said:

I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. All my programs. All my hopes to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. All my dreams to provide education and medical care to the browns and the blacks and the lame and the poor. But if I left that war and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would

¹ As quoted in Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 133.

be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.²

Johnson was engaging in a cost-benefit analysis, with the Great Society programs on one side and Vietnam involvement on the other. Johnson knew that massive mobilization for war in Vietnam would endanger his domestic programs. On the other hand, leaving Vietnam would destroy his credibility and his domestic programs would fail as a result. He chose to attempt a middle ground, with just enough force in Vietnam to maintain his credibility and without drawing too much congressional attention away from the Great Society.

Johnson placed a high premium on how both he and his policies were perceived, as shown in his concern in being “seen as a coward,” and the United States being “seen as an appeaser.” Johnson devoted a great deal of effort to shaping perceptions through the spoken word. During the Vietnam War, Johnson and his speechwriters worked diligently, forming rhetoric which would shape the perceptions of the American people and Congress regarding the conditions and realities in Vietnam, the legitimacy of Johnson’s Vietnam policies, and the viability of resolving the conflict while pushing for domestic reforms. This thesis focuses on the rhetorical balancing act during the escalation of the war in Vietnam.

Domestic concerns dominated the formation and substance of Johnson’s Vietnam war rhetoric. This thesis especially traces the interaction between Johnson’s concern for his Great Society program of domestic legislation and his approach to the Vietnam War rhetorically and diplomatically in August 1964 (chapter 1), spring and summer of 1965 (chapter 2), late 1965-early 1966 (chapter 3), and fall of 1967 (chapter 4). In 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin incidents thrust themselves upon Johnson, who regarded the rising tensions in Vietnam as a distraction from the busy domestic scene that August. The United States’ response to the Gulf of Tonkin incidents

² As quoted in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), 251-252.

was “limited and fitting,” but the gradual intensification of American intervention in Vietnam had begun. Johnson’s limited rhetoric mirrored the limited nature of the military action.

Johnson in 1965 escalated the conflict, but as he did so he refrained from fully acknowledging it publicly. Johnson anticipated major legislative successes in 1965, and refused to compromise that in order to arouse support for the war in Vietnam. As a result, Johnson followed a policy of “minimization” in his Vietnam war rhetoric in 1965.

By late 1965 and early 1966, Johnson was forced to recognize the challenges in Vietnam more candidly. As he prepared for the 1966 State of the Union address and the initiation of a new phase of Great Society legislation, Johnson made use of a bombing pause in Vietnam to enhance his peace-seeking credentials and to establish a more comfortable context for the State of the Union. In that address, Johnson made the case for simultaneously pursuing “guns and butter,” that is, fully supporting American forces in Vietnam and implementing domestic reforms at the same time. To accomplish this, Johnson incorporated a sweeping, metaphysical conception of “liberation” by which he unified the two competing policy areas.

The “guns and butter” approach faltered as the situation with the “guns” failed to improve. In 1967, public opinion declined, and an activist protest movement developed, endangering Johnson’s Presidency itself—not to mention his domestic programs. Thus, Johnson shifted his rhetorical approach toward simple, concrete justifications based on America’s national security, rather than abstract appeals to “liberation,” “freedom,” or “self-determination.” In January 1968, Johnson’s attempts to convince the American people of the merits of the limited war in Vietnam were dashed by the Tet Offensive. Just two months later, on March 31, 1968, Johnson announced his decision not to accept the Democratic nomination in the 1968 presidential election, a decision tantamount to resignation for an incumbent President.

Methodologically, I pursue the thesis in two ways: historical context and rhetorical analysis. First, I present the historical context of the rhetorical formation. In most cases, I give a detailed analysis of the speech's immediate context, both domestically and internationally. I do not intend to separate the rhetorical analysis from its historical context. On the contrary, I argue that the context of the speech—particularly the domestic legislative context—has significant bearing on the nature of the rhetoric. Therefore, this study examines the events surrounding the creation and delivery of each speech, the interaction between Johnson and his speechwriters, and the ways in which Johnson's rhetoric interacted with both his domestic priorities and his Vietnam policy decisions. Further, this thesis gives domestic pressures and priorities due attention. As elaborated above, Johnson earnestly desired to turn the attention of the country to the Great Society and his War on Poverty. Beyond Johnson's own domestic programs, however, were other domestic pressures, including the persistent occurrence of riots around the country and racist violence in the South. Other pressures, such as dissenting voices on the right and the left concerning Johnson's Cold War policies (including Vietnam), are also taken into account. By including these numerous intrinsic and extrinsic factors, I place Johnson's rhetoric in an appropriate context for examining the nature of his case for limited war in Vietnam.

Rhetorical analysis is accomplished primarily on a conceptual level, focusing on the presentation of justificatory narratives, changing characterizations of the North and South Vietnamese, instances of misrepresentation and minimization, and metaphysical appeals.

With these methods, I argue that Johnson's limited war rhetoric consists of at least six distinctive characteristics. First, Johnson made extensive use of strategic misrepresentation: particularly by obscuring and minimizing the United States' role in Vietnam. Second, Johnson's rhetoric of limited war had a limited nature itself. Since Johnson aimed so much of his rhetoric at

domestic audiences for purposes other than mobilization for war, the scope of the rhetoric was limited in what Johnson could advocate. Third, Johnson made use characterizations of the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese, particularly in the Johns Hopkins speech in chapter 3, which presented a development plan for the Mekong Delta. Fourth, Johnson's speeches often invoked idealism. Depicting a distinctive, idealized vision, or "dream" of how the world should be, pervaded his rhetoric regarding Vietnam before 1967. This approach climaxed in the State of the Union Address of 1966, with a messianic zeal for international modernization and development. Fifth, appeals to prior "commitments" and the importance that the United States keep its word to South Vietnam (for example, from the 1954 Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty) became moral arguments for limited war in Johnson's rhetoric. Finally, the use of the "domino theory" served as an appeal to fear, and explained Vietnam's pivotal role in America's national interests.

Certain secondary sources have approached the topic of Johnson's Vietnam rhetoric, but in different ways. The idea of a "rhetoric of limited war" surfaces in Kathleen J. Turner's *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*, although with an almost exclusive emphasis on its formation in relation to the press, and with more of an emphasis on the effect of the rhetoric of limited war than shall be considered here.³ Others, such as Moya Ann Ball in *Vietnam-on-the-Potomac*, focus more on internal decision-making processes and the effect of rhetoric in decision-making groups than on the formation of rhetoric intended for the American people and Congress.⁴

In conclusion, this thesis makes use of historical and rhetorical methods to approach the question of how the Johnson administration went about representing and defending the limited

³ Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2-7, 147-150.

⁴ Moya Ann Ball, *Vietnam-on-the-Potomac* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 2-4.

engagement of military forces in Vietnam to the American people and to Congress. The historical methods examines various extrinsic and intrinsic factors to the rhetoric. The rhetorical methods includes a framework for understanding war rhetoric, as well as a more open-ended analysis. These methods elucidates the aforementioned characteristics of Johnson's Vietnam rhetoric as a means to understand how the Johnson administration defended and represented its limited military venture in Vietnam.

The Rhetoric of the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis

During the summer of 1964, developments in domestic and foreign policy accelerated for President Lyndon B. Johnson. With an antipoverty bill moving through Congress, and with more than 16,000 advisors plus a substantial naval patrol assisting South Vietnamese forces in a war with North Vietnam, in early August 1964 a crisis developed in the Gulf of Tonkin. To Johnson, preoccupied with domestic political events, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was merely a distraction. This chapter describes that distraction and Johnson's limited rhetorical and military responses to it.

The Gulf of Tonkin Distraction

On the evening of Monday, August 3, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson received a phone call from his aide and speechwriter Bill Moyers to discuss which Republicans might vote for a landmark piece of poverty legislation. Johnson asked Moyers about his next foreign policy address, scheduled at Syracuse University that Wednesday, August 5. Moyers responded that "the lead is reasserting civilian control over nuclear weapons...and what we've done to control the spread of nuclear weapons. [National Security Advisor McGeorge] Bundy and [White House aide and speechwriter Richard] Goodwin and I met for an hour today at lunch on it." President Johnson responded affirmatively to that plan.¹

Despite attacks on the *USS Maddox* by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin just a day earlier,² Johnson's next major national security speech was intended to confront nuclear proliferation, not the brewing crisis in Vietnam. He had chosen to downplay, both practically and rhetorically, the events in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2. This began to

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson and Bill Moyers conversation, August 3, 1964, 7:22pm, White House Tapes, Transcripts of Telephone Conversations: White House Series, August 1964, entry 4646.

² Schulman, Bruce J., *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston: Bedford /St. Martin's, 2007), 143.

change, however, with two phone calls from Secretary of State Robert McNamara on Tuesday, August 4. The first, at 10:53 a.m., stated that two unidentified vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin were approaching the *USS Maddox*. The second, at 11:06 a.m., brought news of another torpedo attack on the *Maddox*.³ This information had not been fully confirmed, however, and the Johnson administration might have preferred to keep a low profile on this alleged attack as well, until news of it was leaked to the press late in the afternoon.

McNamara called a second time to inform Johnson of the leak, and to discuss a draft statement for immediate release from the Pentagon describing attacks on two U.S. destroyers (the *Maddox* and, presumably, the *Ticonderoga*, which was also in the vicinity). The attack was presented as fact in this statement, and while no damage or casualties were reported on the American side, several North Vietnamese patrol boats had allegedly been sunk. Johnson authorized the release of this public statement.⁴ Even then, Johnson resisted but finally allowed CBS and NBC to set up live TV coverage from the White House concerning the news about Vietnam.

A meeting of the National Security Council in the early evening changed the public approach of the administration toward the events in the Gulf of Tonkin. After this meeting, Johnson called Congressman George Mahon, a Democrat from Texas, and mentioned that the administration now planned to retaliate against North Vietnam and that Johnson would make an announcement later in the evening.⁵ It is telling that, after Johnson and Mahon discussed the need for retaliation against the North Vietnamese, Johnson turned sharply to address his "Poverty Bill." From the course of the conversation, it is apparent that the transmission of information

³ Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert S. McNamara conversations, August 4, 1964, in Michael Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 497-498.

⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert S. McNamara conversation, August 4, 1964 in *Ibid.*, 500.

⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson and Congressman George Mahon conversation, August 4, 1964, 8:38pm, White House Tapes. Transcripts of Telephone Conversations: White House Series, August 1964, entry 4700a.

regarding Vietnam was more of a formality, and that Johnson—experienced and successful Senate majority leader that he had been—wanted to go into more detail about the passage of his poverty bill. This conversation symbolized Johnson’s Presidential priorities in August 1964, and foreshadowed the increasing conflict between foreign and domestic concerns in his administration. The situation in Vietnam—as exemplified in the Gulf of Tonkin incidents—was essentially a distraction for Johnson, who wished in the summer of 1964 to focus on his War on Poverty, not a distant war in Vietnam.

The inclusion of the poverty bill in the above conversation also indicated a portion of the flurry of activity regarding domestic issues on August 4th. With the vote on the poverty bill approaching, phone calls to congressmen and senators consumed much of Johnson’s time. Also on this day, investigators had unearthed the bodies of three slain civil rights workers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee six miles west of Philadelphia, Mississippi.⁶ All of this was overshadowed in the press, however, by the leak of an alleged attack thousands of miles away in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Such intense domestic activity on that day likely shaped Johnson’s perception of the Vietnam conflict as limited and peripheral. The leak of the Gulf of Tonkin incident signaled the potential threat the conflict in Vietnam posed to Johnson’s domestic agenda. As a result, Johnson’s public rhetoric emphasized limiting the conflict in the hours and days following the alleged second set of attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The decision to retaliate against North Vietnam came with a decision to make a live public statement late that evening—a spontaneous decision taken during the National Security Council meeting earlier that day, at which the Council also formulated the text of the statement.

⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson and Cartha D. DeLoach conversation, August 4, 1964, 8:01pm, White House Tapes, Transcripts of Telephone Conversations: White House Series, August 1964, entry 4693.

Johnson's next major national security speech, therefore, would not be at Syracuse University but from the Fish Room at the White House.

Yet, in the two hours before delivering the speech, Johnson remained engaged with domestic issues. He made phone calls concerning the discovery of the bodies in Mississippi, some riots in New Jersey, and the Poverty Bill up until approximately an hour before the delivery of his late-night speech to the nation. In a shrewd election-year move, Johnson also called the Republican candidate for president, Senator Barry M. Goldwater, and read the draft of the speech to him an hour and a half before presenting the speech. Johnson secured Goldwater's support for the draft, which Goldwater called a "good statement."⁷ In sum, a notably active domestic environment surrounded the delivery of this first public address concerning the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Addressing the Nation

At 11:36pm, President Lyndon B. Johnson addressed the nation with a short declaration of limited retaliation against North Vietnam. As text, the speech is eight paragraphs long, with a clearly delineated structure. The first paragraph sets out the crisis "renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas."⁸ Having identified the crisis, Johnson described two tiers of military responses: (1) the response by the ships and aircraft at the scene, and (2) actions which moved beyond self-defense and into "positive reply." Johnson announced that the second-tier response—referred to blandly as "air action"—was taking place even as he was delivering the televised address. Johnson then turned to the broader conflict, depicting the "peaceful villagers of South Vietnam" as subject to "aggression by terror" by the malevolent

⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson and Barry Goldwater, conversation, August 4, 1964, 10:06pm, White House Tapes, Transcripts of Telephone Conversations: White House Series, August 1964, entry 4715a.

⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin, August 4, 1964," *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1965), 927. Hereafter cited as *PPP: LBJ, 1963-1964*.

North Vietnamese.⁹ Further, this “aggression” had been directed against the U.S. Navy operating in the Gulf of Tonkin—justifying a defensive action by the United States.

The central portion of the speech, the fifth paragraph, concisely defended American involvement in Vietnam, and set the tone for future speeches on the subject:

The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Vietnam will be redoubled by this outrage. Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war.¹⁰

In future speeches, the “commitment” of the United States to South Vietnam would obtain increased definition and importance in Johnson’s rhetoric, and would remain a primary justification for American involvement throughout the war. Also, the reference to “the risks of spreading aggression” foreshadowed the use of World War II analogies and the “domino theory” in future justifications for America’s presence in Vietnam.

Finally, Johnson turned his attention to diplomatic actions, in order to demonstrate Johnson’s desire for peace in action. The President noted that he had sent Ambassador Adlai Stevenson to present the issue to the United Nations Security Council and had directed Secretary of State Dean Rusk to notify other nations of the United States’ position. These moves supported the speech’s emphasis on peace versus aggression by providing concrete examples of diplomatic engagement.

Speaking during the waning months of his Presidential campaign against Barry Goldwater, Johnson added: “And just a few minutes ago I was able to reach Senator Goldwater and I am glad to say that he has expressed his support of the statement that I am making to you tonight.”¹¹ Such a move demonstrated efforts towards bipartisan cooperation, as well as

⁹ *Ibid.*, 927.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 927.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 928.

Johnson's constant awareness of his actions' domestic political implications. It further displayed a clever ability to turn a military operation into an electoral advantage—particularly during a race against a hawkish¹² conservative Republican.

The August 4 televised report contained the seeds of a troubling tension between a “limited and fitting” reply and the United States’ “determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in southeast Asia.”¹³ The closing paragraph sets these contending ideas side by side:

It is a solemn responsibility to have to order even limited military action by forces whose overall strength is as vast and as awesome as those of the United States of America, but it is my considered conviction, shared throughout your Government, that firmness in the right is indispensable today for peace: that firmness will always be measured. Its mission is peace.¹⁴

The idea that “firmness,” or a “positive reply” of airstrikes—supported by a Congressional resolution authorizing “all necessary measures”—could serve to further a “mission of peace,” posed a conceptual problem. The key feature, for Johnson, was that the action be “limited and fitting,” or “measured.” He did not ask for a declaration of war, or total mobilization—clear admissions of conditions of war rather than peace. Instead, he presented limited military action to turn back, but not to conquer, aggressive North Vietnamese forces.

As a result, the address strained both to justify military action and to minimize any broader consequences of such action. Johnson suggested that brief surges of force in response to instances of aggression in southeast Asia could reestablish a peaceful status quo and successfully keep North Vietnamese ambitions in check. No mention was made of possible responses if the “limited and fitting” airstrikes failed to prevent future North Vietnamese aggression. The internal

¹² During this time, both in the press and in private presidential memoranda, “hawks” denoted those who pressed the administration to take drastically stronger military action in Vietnam, while “doves” denoted those who advocated withdrawing troops and seeking immediate and unconditional peace with North Vietnam.

¹³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Radio and Television Report,” *PPP: LBJ, 1963-1964*, 927.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 928.

tension between avenging the “act of aggression” and struggling for “peace and security in southeast Asia” established an important yet weak strand in Johnson’s rhetoric of limited war, a tension which intensified as American military commitments in Vietnam increased.¹⁵

Syracuse

The following morning, President Johnson elaborated on the remarks of the previous evening to an audience at Syracuse University. The Syracuse speech took a broader scope than that of the televised address. Johnson contrasted peace and aggression, presented four justificatory narratives for American involvement in Vietnam, and contained an instance of strategic misrepresentation.

Johnson began by describing in detail the events of the prior three days. On August 2, North Vietnamese vessels attacked the U.S. destroyer *Maddox*, and on August 4, “that attack was repeated in those same waters against two United States destroyers.”¹⁶ Johnson also presented the American response in detail, describing airstrikes by the United States Seventh Fleet against North Vietnamese ships and other “supporting facilities.” He expressed readiness to move beyond the responses to diplomatic action—an early indication of the “peaceful purposes” of the military actions: “Appropriate armed action has been taken...The United States is now asking that this be brought immediately and urgently before the Security Council of the United Nations.”¹⁷

The speech conspicuously presents two opposing forces: aggression and peace. The speech personifies them, considering them capable of action as almost metaphysical forces. By personifying both aggression and peace, and setting them in contrast to each other, Johnson

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 927-928.

¹⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at Syracuse University on the Communist Challenge in Southeast Asia. August 5, 1964,” *PPP: LBJ, 1963-1964*, 928.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 928.

presented a stark choice, a polarization, to the audience—forcing a simplified, conscious decision between accepting aggression or pursuing peace.

Johnson presented aggression first: “Aggression—deliberate, willful, and systematic aggression—has unmasked its face to the entire world. The world remembers—the world must never forget—that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed. We of the United States have not forgotten.”¹⁸ The abstraction of “aggression” in relation to North Vietnam therefore enabled Johnson to draw a parallel to the “aggression unchallenged” from World War II. In addition, the concept that “aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed” suggests an early version of the “domino theory,”¹⁹ which grew more prominent in Johnson’s rhetoric in later addresses.

Peace, in contrast to aggression, is used to broaden the importance of the attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin:

Peace cannot be assured merely by assuring the safety of the United States destroyer *Maddox* or the safety of other vessels of other flags. Peace requires that the existing agreements in the area be honored. Peace requires that we and all our friends stand firm against the present aggressions of the government of North Vietnam. The government of North Vietnam is today flouting the will of the world for peace. The world is challenged to make its will against war known and to make it known clearly and to make it felt and to make it felt decisively.²⁰

Thus Johnson implicitly appealed for multilateral action against North Vietnam, beyond assuring the safety of foreign vessels off the coast of North Vietnam. In the speech, the concept of “peace,” as a kind of metaphysical entity or ideal form, *requires* certain actions by the United

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 928.

¹⁹ The “domino theory” was applied frequently during the Cold War, and effectively indicates a belief that aggression (especially Communist aggression), will continue until forcibly stopped. The most basic precept in this context, roughly stated, is as follows: If one country “falls” to Communism, all of the other countries in the region will likely be overtaken by Communists as well. Johnson takes up this theme with more fervor in his September 29, 1967 speech in San Antonio, Texas.

²⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at Syracuse University,” *PPP: LBJ, 1963-1964*, 929.

States and its “friends,” including to “stand firm against the present aggressions.”²¹ They must oppose war “clearly and...decisively,” by using military force. Thus the speech encountered the same difficulty as the televised address: reconciling peaceful aims with destructive military action. The solution for Johnson remained to limit the military actions. The U.S. was taking “appropriate armed action” and—presumably pressing no further—this action would restore peace without inciting further retaliation by North Vietnam. This would prove to be a difficult contradiction for Johnson to navigate as the war escalated.

The Syracuse speech wove together four justificatory narratives for American involvement in Vietnam, all of which resurfaced throughout the Vietnam War. First, Johnson described a narrative of commitments, outlining the recent history of international agreements concerning Southeast Asia: the 1954 Geneva Accords, the Manila pact establishing the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and the 1962 Declaration of Neutrality of Laos. The Geneva Accords and the 1962 Declaration were used to condemn North Vietnam’s actions, in a manner reminiscent of an international legal indictment:

In 1954 that government [of North Vietnam] pledged that it would respect the territory under the military control of the other party and engage in no hostile act against the other party. In 1962 that government pledged that it would “not introduce into the Kingdom of Laos foreign troops or military personnel.” That government of North Vietnam is now willfully and systematically violating those agreements of both 1954 and 1962.²²

Thus Johnson took a wider view of North Vietnamese aggression, and urged action by “nations that are devoted to peace” based on the preexisting conflict in North Vietnam, rather than merely on the basis of attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin. But above all, these international agreements bound America to defend South Vietnam against the North’s aggression. The narrative of American commitments, originating in the SEATO agreement, emphasized collective security as a legal

²¹ *Ibid.*, 929.

²² *Ibid.*, 929.

justification for taking action in Vietnam: “That pact recognized that aggression by means of armed attack on South Vietnam would endanger the peace and the safety of the nations signing that solemn agreement.”²³ Johnson’s use of these commitments reinforced the limited objectives of American activity in Vietnam, in that all of the international agreements focused on maintaining the independence of both South and North Vietnam. Since the United States based its intervention on these agreements, its objectives were permanently limited to reestablishing the status quo. Larger objectives, such as the overthrow of the regime in North Vietnam, would not be, and were not, military options for the United States.

Second, the speech composed a narrative of continuity with respect to American Vietnam policy: “For 10 years three American Presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—and the American people have been actively concerned with threats to the peace and security of the peoples of southeast Asia from the Communist government of North Vietnam.”²⁴ By establishing a continuity narrative, Johnson claimed that he had not introduced any major changes in policy. Establishing this continuity of policy and committing to the perpetuation of that policy limited Johnson’s policy options in Vietnam. Changes in objectives or tactics would disrupt the continuity Johnson professed. Indeed, this became a problem when Johnson’s Vietnam strategy shifted in 1965.

Johnson described four objectives he shared with Eisenhower and Kennedy concerning southeast Asia: (1) “That the governments of southeast Asia honor the international agreements which apply in the area,” (2) “That those governments leave each other alone,” (3) “That they

²³ *Ibid.*, 929.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 929.

resolve their differences peacefully,” and (4) “That they devote their talents to bettering the lives of their peoples by working against poverty and disease and ignorance.”²⁵

The first three objectives constituted typical foreign policy aims. Objective 1 fits into the narrative of commitments. The second objective supported the status quo of Communist-capitalist coexistence—rather than active attempts to root out Communism—in southeast Asia, and therefore signified the limited nature of America’s intervention. Objective 3 reflects again the motif of peace, as contrasted with aggression. The fourth objective in the continuity narrative, however, diverges in nature from the first three, and reflects Johnson’s idealism and preoccupation with domestic affairs. With Objective 4, Johnson assessed the governments of North and South Vietnam, and urged them to address issues which Johnson himself pursued in the summer of 1964, particularly that of poverty. In the Syracuse speech, Johnson only briefly mentions this objective, but by April 1965, in his Johns Hopkins University speech, it would take center stage. For Johnson, this development objective, depicted as continuous with Eisenhower’s and Kennedy’s policies, became the greater purpose towards which the other objectives pointed.

The third narrative Johnson presents is that of a Cold War context. The Cold War narrative, for Johnson, included past challenges “that we have faced with courage and that we have met with strength in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin and Korea, in Lebanon and in Cuba.”²⁶ Cold War images from all of these countries situated American actions in Vietnam among America’s other major foreign policy ventures. However, the Syracuse speech avoided mentioning the United States’ primary Cold War opponents: China and the Soviet Union. Throughout America’s engagement in Vietnam, Johnson studiously refrained from implicating the Soviet Union in his rhetoric concerning Vietnam—likely not to jeopardize disarmament

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 929.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 930.

negotiations occurring around the same time. Johnson strongly criticized Communist China in later speeches, however, but he sidestepped such references at this stage. The relative lack of confrontational rhetoric toward the Soviet Union and China reflected Johnson's desire to avoid a wider war, in spite of the role they both played in assisting North Vietnam against the United States.

Finally, Johnson invoked World War II images as a historical narrative applicable to the situation in Vietnam. He used the memory of World War II as a parallel to the Vietnam conflict: "The world remembers—the world must never forget—that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed."²⁷ Johnson's World War II analogies served as a reason for stronger action, and as a warning. If North Vietnam were behaving similarly to Germany or Japan in the 1940s, this would be a call to arms, to stop North Vietnam at all costs. Further, memories of the horrors of "aggression unleashed" evoked a desire to prevent another world war from occurring.

The Syracuse speech also demonstrated a significant instance of strategic misrepresentation. For example, Johnson stated that "the attacks were unprovoked," as part of his justification for a military "reply" against North Vietnam. This could be portrayed as a misrepresentation of Johnson's own opinion, because on Monday, August 3, 1964 (the day after the first attack, and the day before the alleged second attack), LBJ said that "there have been some covert operations in that area [of the Gulf] that we have been carrying on—blowing up some bridges and things of that kind, roads and so forth. So [I] imagine they [the North Vietnamese] wanted to put a stop to it."²⁸ This noted a possible provocation for the attacks by the North Vietnamese, and therefore a possible basis for determining a strategic misrepresentation. After the leak of the attacks to the press, Johnson likely felt compelled to take action in self-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 928.

²⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert Anderson conversation, Monday, August 3, 1964, 9:46am, in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 493.

defense, and to avoid admitting fault. If Johnson had not responded, the “hawks” in the United States, such as Barry Goldwater, would likely have seized on Johnson’s apparent appeasement of North Vietnam and reaped domestic political benefits at Johnson’s expense.

Conclusion

The events of August 4, 1964 induced the formulation and presentation of a rhetoric of limited war. Johnson’s use of the idea of development in Vietnam, and his employment of the World War II historical narrative, became more central to his Vietnam rhetoric in subsequent years. Both speeches heavily emphasized peace and the limited nature of America’s involvement in Vietnam. Johnson justified America’s military actions in terms of peace—introducing the tension between aggression and peacefulness. With an eye on his domestic platform, Johnson strove to maintain the limited nature of the conflict. President Johnson did not desire a long, costly war in Vietnam. Neither did he seek to eliminate the Communist government in North Vietnam; rather, he appealed to North Vietnam for a return to the 1954 status quo, with an independent North Vietnam and an independent South Vietnam side by side. As a result, Johnson avoided inflammatory statements concerning the USSR or China, and he steered clear of high-minded, impassioned rhetoric—mirroring a limited military venture with limited rhetoric.

Chapter 2: Minimizing the Escalation, 1965

In 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson made decisions to escalate the conflict in Vietnam and to dramatically increase American military involvement there. These decisions, however, were accompanied by a much less dramatic intensification in Johnson's Vietnam rhetoric. As the South Vietnamese faltered in their struggle against North Vietnam in early 1965, Johnson made a series of decisions deepening American involvement: the extensive bombing campaign ("Rolling Thunder") was introduced in February,¹ the first Marines landed in Vietnam to protect the airbases on March 8,² and Johnson decided to expand the size and mandate of the Marines force on April 1.³ All the while, Johnson continued in the spirit of the limited rhetoric of August 1964—but in a much different context. The limited rhetoric of August 1964 mirrored the truly limited military actions at that time. As 1965 wore on, the administration's suppressed public pronouncements about Vietnam reflected the reality in Vietnam less and less.

This chapter chronicles Johnson's major Vietnam policy speech at Johns Hopkins University in April 1965 and his press conference announcing the decision for escalation in July 1965. Both speeches minimized the magnitude and import of the decisions Johnson had taken in private, both emphasized the defense of abstract principles (e.g. "freedom" and "independence") in justifying America's involvement in Vietnam, and both developed the justificatory narratives of American commitments and continuity as well as the historical World War II narrative. The Johns Hopkins speech contributed to the "minimization" policy, and indicated Johnson's justifications for American intervention in Vietnam during 1965. A study of the July 28 press

¹ Telephone conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert McNamara, 26 February 1965, 9:10am; Michael Beschloss, ed., *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 193-196.

² George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 155-157.

³ Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence McCone to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Carter), 1 April 1965, United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1965*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 513. Hereafter cited as *FRUS, 1965*.

conference reveals a stark example of the “minimization” policy, and offers a more thorough explanation of the domestic reasoning behind it.

Johns Hopkins: “Peace without Conquest”

In a National Security Council meeting on March 26, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson proposed that “an overall policy speech on Vietnam should be prepared. We should enlist new brain power in drafting the things which need to be said.”⁴ The president took a long-standing offer to make a foreign policy speech at Johns Hopkins University, and set the date for April 7.⁵ The speech would focus on a development project in the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam and an offer for “unconditional negotiations” with North Vietnam, with brief recognition of increases in American military activities in Vietnam. Such activities were deliberately downplayed, however, in accordance with Johnson’s policy throughout this period.

For at least two months, Johnson had strictly instructed his staff not to indicate any change in policy regarding Vietnam.⁶ McGeorge Bundy, the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, explicitly stated this policy in another National Security Council meeting on April 2: “Until the next Presidential speech...all present should be guided by the President’s Press Conference of 1 April. Under no circumstances should there be any reference to the movement of U.S. forces or other future courses of action.”⁷ In the April 1 press conference, Johnson had stated: “I know of no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated.”⁸ This policy provided the immediate backdrop for the Johns Hopkins speech and this policy continued, in some form, throughout 1965.

⁴ Summary Notes of the 550th Meeting of the National Security Council, 26 March 1965, *FRUS, 1965*, Vol. 2, 485

⁵ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 607.

⁶ William Bundy, Unpublished Manuscript, 23-25, October 28, 1971, Papers of William Bundy, Box 1. LBJ Library.

⁷ Summary Notes of the 551st Meeting of the National Security Council, 2 April 1965, *FRUS, 1965*, 2:516.

⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s News Conference of April 1, 1965. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 370. Hereafter cited as *PPP: LBJ, 1965*.

Johnson delivered the address, entitled “Peace without Conquest,” on April 7, 1965 on the campus of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Early in the speech, Johnson framed the address as a quest for peace in Vietnam: “We are...stating our American policy tonight which we believe will contribute toward peace in this area of the world.”⁹ Thus, Johnson introduced the diplomatic approach accompanying this policy such that “we will never be second in the search for...a peaceful settlement in Viet-Nam... We have stated this position over and over again, fifty times and more, to friend and foe alike. And we remain ready, with this purpose. for unconditional discussions.”¹⁰ The commitment to peace, begun in the Gulf of Tonkin speeches, continued at Johns Hopkins. In this way, Johnson reintroduced the common tension in his limited war rhetoric between persistence in fighting and allowance for peace by asserting that “we will not be defeated,” and that “we remain ready...for unconditional discussions,” at the same time. This tension in Johnson’s rhetoric throughout his presidency would resurface with special poignancy in Johnson’s Vietnam press conference three months later.

Johnson, in the Johns Hopkins speech, vividly depicted the nature of the conflict—in which Johnson claimed the United States “will not be defeated”—with detailed characterizations of the North and South Vietnamese:

...it is a war of unparalleled brutality. Simple farmers are the targets of assassination and kidnapping. Women and children are strangled in the night because their men are loyal to their government. And helpless villages are ravaged by sneak attacks. Large-scale raids are conducted on towns, and terror strikes in the heart of cities.¹¹

This section characterized the South Vietnamese as weak and helpless in the face of North Vietnamese terror and brutality. Johnson depicted the North Vietnamese as ruthless and bent on

⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address at Johns Hopkins University: ‘Peace Without Conquest’,” April 7, 1965 *PPP: LBJ, 1965*, Vol. 1, 394.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 396.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

“total conquest.”¹² He also associated their aggression to the actions of “an old enemy”: “Over this war—and all Asia—is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peking.”¹³ This represented a shift in rhetoric compared to August 1964, when Johnson had avoided verbally confronting either China or the USSR. In this speech, Johnson continued to refuse to mention the USSR, but spoke strongly against the role of China in Southeast Asia. In this respect, Johnson in this address intensified his rhetoric.

Despite increasing the force of rhetoric against Communist China, Johnson continued to minimize the United States’ recent policy decisions in Southeast Asia. Johnson asserted America’s resolve and recent actions in Vietnam in this way:

Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam, and its freedom from attack... We will do everything necessary to reach that objective. And we will do only what is absolutely necessary. In recent months attacks on South Viet-Nam were stepped up. Thus, it became necessary for us to increase our response and to make attacks by air. *This is not a change of purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires.*¹⁴

Clearly Johnson was continuing the public line he had followed thus far in 1965: there had been no change in policy. The decisions taken during February and March 1965, as outlined above, indicated otherwise, particularly the decision to implement “Rolling Thunder.” Describing this intensive bombing campaign merely as an “increase” in “our response” with “attacks by air” was certainly an understatement.

Johnson proceeded to provide three reasons for why the United States was in Vietnam. First, “We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954, every American President has offered support to the people of South Viet-Nam.”¹⁵ Johnson here reintroduced the justificatory narrative of commitments—identified in the speech at Syracuse in August 1964—and blends it with the narrative of continuity. The actions of recent Presidents constituted the

¹² *Ibid.*, 394.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 395. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 395.

promise to South Vietnam that the United States would defend their independence, and Johnson intended “to keep that promise.”¹⁶ Second, “We are also there to strengthen world order.”¹⁷ Johnson in this explanation broadened the American commitment to include promises to maintain a peaceful world order. Finally, Johnson stated, “We are also there because there are great stakes in the balance.”¹⁸ Johnson here briefly utilized a form of the “domino theory” to support this claim: “Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Viet-Nam would bring an end to conflict... The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied.”¹⁹ Significantly, Johnson used the domino theory to illustrate dangers to abstract principles (i.e. “freedom” and “independence”). In later speeches, Johnson would construe the domino theory to relate more nearly to America’s immediate national security. Johnson drew the domino theory “lesson” from World War II, and utilized a biblical reference to describe it: “We must say in Southeast Asia—as we did in Europe—in the words of the Bible: Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.”²⁰ In this way, Johnson also furthered the World War II historical narrative, which he had introduced in the televised address concerning the Gulf of Tonkin incidents.

Later in the speech, Johnson characterized the people of Vietnam again but turned from the images of “helpless villages” being “ravaged” by the North Vietnamese and instead focused on similar experiences of impoverishment in both North and South Vietnam. Johnson utilized this shift to introduce his development project for Vietnam.

For what do the people of North Viet-Nam want? They want what their neighbors also desire: food for their hunger; health for their bodies; a chance to learn; progress for their country; and an end to the bondage of material misery... These countries of southeast Asia are homes for millions of impoverished people. Each day these people rise at dawn and struggle through until the night to wrestle existence from the soil. They are often wracked by disease, plagued by hunger, and death comes at the early age of 40... Now

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 395.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 395. Quoted from Job 38:11, King James Version.

there must be a much more massive effort to improve the life of man in that conflict-torn corner of our world... For our part I will ask the Congress to join in a billion dollar American investment in this effort as soon as it is underway. The vast Mekong River can provide food and water and power on a scale to dwarf even our own TVA.²¹

International observers had long recognized the potential of the Mekong River in development schemes for Southeast Asia, and Johnson found in this plan a means for applying his passion for domestic reform to his policies in Southeast Asia. The Mekong project touched on the issues central to Johnson's Great Society: health, economic development, and poverty alleviation. Johnson in 1961 had encountered and expressed support for United Nations plans for the development of the Lower Mekong Basin dating from 1957 during his preparations for a trip to Vietnam as Vice President.²² The idea had regained international currency shortly before the Johns Hopkins speech, particularly in a March 1965 publication by the United Nations Office of Public Information entitled "Putting the Mekong to Work—An International Undertaking".²³

Johnson attempted by this proposal to impose his dream of a Great Society upon his venture in Vietnam. The war distracted Johnson from developing his country, and he thought perhaps the Vietnamese viewed the war similarly. If so, the offer of a billion-dollar development project would have possessed appeal as a part of a peace deal. Johnson's development plan, however, demonstrated a drastic simplification of the problems in Vietnam, and an attempt by Johnson to answer these problems with solutions from his experiences as a legislator.

July 28, 1965: "The low-key way"

Johnson continued the "minimization" approach throughout 1965, despite making far-reaching decisions to escalate the war during the same period. Even after the introduction of the "Rolling Thunder" air campaign and the deployment of ground troops, the military situation in

²¹ *Ibid.*, 396.

²² Memorandum, Arthur Goldschmidt, Director of Special Fund Activities, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson. May 4, 1961, White House Confidential File, "5/20/66", LBJ Library.

²³ "Putting the Mekong to Work—An International Undertaking," United Nations Office of Public Information, Economic and Social Information Unit, March 1965, White House Confidential File, "5/20/66", LBJ Library.

Vietnam had deteriorated. Thus Johnson faced a decision which Eisenhower and Kennedy before him had been able to avoid: “*get out, or get in with more, much more.*”²⁴ The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended escalating the conflict, including the immediate addition of up to 150,000 American troops, and a dramatically expanded mandate for their mission. This likely would have demanded a declaration of national emergency, and measures to put the country on a war footing.²⁵ By late July 1965, pressure increased from the “hard-liners”—both inside the administration and out—to send these ground forces and intensify the bombing.²⁶ The primary voice against escalation within the administration was, famously, George Ball—who argued instead that “there is no course that will allow us to cut our losses... The pressures to create a larger war would be irresistible... [we can] take our losses, let their government fall apart, negotiate, discuss, knowing full well there will be a probable take-over by the Communists. This is disagreeable, I know.”²⁷ By July 27, Johnson had decided to go ahead with the escalation, but he refused to take the drastic actions recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He elected to increase American forces in Vietnam from 75,000 to 175,000 by the end of 1965, with half of this increase (50,000) to be deployed immediately.²⁸

The President recognized that these decisions required a public announcement, but he hesitated due to the attention it would draw away from Great Society legislation. The Great Society was never far from Johnson’s mind when it came to decisions to commit forces in Vietnam. In his own memoirs, Johnson stated:

In a wondrous time of hope and optimism we had begun the building of a better society for our people. The danger that we might have to slow that building, in order to take care

²⁴ Jack Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), 318-319.

²⁵ Joseph A. Califano, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 32-33.

²⁶ William Bundy, Unpublished Manuscript, 30-19, December 9, 1971, Papers of William Bundy, Box 1, LBJ Library. Hereafter cited as “WB, Unpublished MS”.

²⁷ Valenti, *A Very Human President*, 328.

²⁸ WB, Unpublished MS, 30-1, 30-28.

of our obligations abroad, brought added anguish. So on that July 27, 1965, two great streams converged--the dream of a Great Society at home and the inescapable demands of our obligations halfway around the world. They were to run in confluence until the end of my Administration.²⁹

In order to decrease the impact on “the building of a better society,” Johnson’s first instinct was to increase public notifications regarding domestic policy at an equal rate with public notifications concerning Vietnam: “How can we get everybody [i.e. other cabinet members] to compete with McNamara in the press? We are trying to do many other things with our economic and health projects. Can’t we constantly remind the people that we are doing something besides bombing?”³⁰

In practice, Johnson opted instead to downplay the announcement by following what William Bundy called “the low-key way.”³¹ First, Johnson attempted to reduce the impact of the announcement by presenting it during a midday news conference, not in a televised address or a speech to a joint-session of Congress.³² Further, Johnson intentionally added two other newsworthy announcements to this press conference: the nomination of Abe Fortas to the United States Supreme Court, and the nomination of John Chancellor, an NBC News correspondent, as Director of Voice of America.³³ As a result, the context of the pronouncement lacked the gravity of a major address, and contained other revelations intended to distract the public from the Vietnam decisions.

Second, Johnson took the “low-key way” by manipulating the specifics of the announcement, thereby understating the extent of the decisions he had taken. Richard Goodwin wrote much of the statement’s text, and upon submitting the final draft to Johnson, remarked: “It

²⁹ As quoted in WB, Unpublished MS, 30-22.

³⁰ Valenti, *A Very Human President*, 339.

³¹ WB, Unpublished MS, 30-23.

³² WB, Unpublished MS, 30-1.

³³ Califano, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 48. Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s News Conference of July 28, 1965,” *PPP: LBJ, 1965*, Vol. 2, 798-799.

is, as you suggested, a fairly tough, firm statement. Although, as I think you also wanted, the new military moves are stated as low-key as possible.”³⁴ In fact, notwithstanding the decision to increase ground forces by 100,000, Johnson specified only the first, immediate 50,000 and vaguely stated that reinforcements would be added as needed:

I have today ordered to Viet-Nam the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested.³⁵

William Bundy argued that Johnson phrased the force additions in this way with the knowledge that these words would run as headlines in the papers, and would “set the tone for the national reaction.”³⁶ Johnson’s misrepresentation of the military buildup became even more apparent during the questions portion of the news conference. When asked, “Mr. President, does the fact that you are sending additional forces to Viet-Nam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard American installations and to act as an emergency backup?” Johnson answered: “*It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply any change of objectives.*”³⁷ Thus Johnson maintained his insistence throughout this period—from the early decisions for air strikes in February to the massive escalation of July—that there had been no change in policy.

At the close of his statement, Johnson presented the tension between the choices for escalation and his desires for domestic progress in a strikingly candid fashion. He enumerated aspirations to ensure adequate health care for all, to eliminate poverty, and to provide equal opportunity to people of every race, all of which were “what I have wanted all my life since I was a little boy.” And these desires related directly to Vietnam: “I do not want to see all those

³⁴ Memorandum, Richard Goodwin to the President, July 28, 1965, 4:20am, White House Press Office Files, Box 73, LBJ Library.

³⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s News Conference of July 28, 1965,” *PPP: LBJ, 1965*, Vol. 2, 795.

³⁶ WB. Unpublished MS, 30-29.

³⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s News Conference of July 28, 1965,” *LBJ: PPP, 1965*, Vol. 2, 801. Emphasis added.

hopes and all those dreams of so many people for so many years now drowned in the wasteful ravages of cruel wars. I am going to do all I can do to see that that never happens.”³⁸ The tension in Johnson’s rhetoric between peaceful development and responses to aggression thus manifested itself in a deeply personal, emotional manner.

As at Baltimore in April, Johnson presented a vision for development in South Vietnam in terms strikingly similar to those he used to describe the Great Society: “As battle rages, we will continue as best we can to help the good people of South Viet-Nam enrich the condition of their life, to feed the hungry and to tend the sick, and teach the young, and shelter the homeless, and to help the farmer to increase his crops, and the worker to find a job.” For Johnson, socioeconomic development at home and abroad were “part of our obligations of justice toward our fellow man.”³⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, these statements deliberately minimized the import of Johnson’s escalations decisions in favor of promoting his domestic policies. They also indicated that in the coming months, the administration would be forced to confront the issue of “guns and butter” in its policies and in its rhetoric. Again, Bundy asserts: “[Johnson’s] hope, and gamble, was that by gradual rather than abrupt techniques of leadership the country and the Congress could be brought to support to the full both war and domestic reform.”⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 797.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 797.

⁴⁰ WB, Unpublished MS, 30-33.

Chapter 3: The Christmas Bombing Pause and the Great Balancing Act of 1966

President Johnson faced a deteriorating and increasingly costly military situation in Vietnam in late 1965. Yet Johnson clung to his hopes for a Great Society and continued to press for domestic reforms despite the complications in Vietnam. We have seen previously the foreign-domestic policy tension the war caused for Johnson, a tension he strictly kept private throughout the escalation of 1965. Indeed, throughout his administration he had disguised the difficulty of balancing domestic reforms with increasing involvement in Vietnam. In his 1966 State of the Union Address, however, Johnson directly tackled this issue, claiming that the United States could, and should, successfully confront foreign and domestic problems (“guns and butter”) simultaneously.

This chapter will focus on Johnson’s rhetorical moves in December 1965-January 1966, primarily the 1966 State of the Union speech. The first section describes the context of the speech, the bombing pause of December 1965-January 1966, which itself served a rhetorical purpose for Johnson. The second section examines the speech itself, noting especially Johnson’s candor, certain internal tensions in the text, and a series of metaphysical appeals. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an assessment of the speech’s reception.

The Christmas Bombing Pause as Rhetoric: Addressing “the Fulbrights and Lippmanns”

The July 1965 escalation of the war in Vietnam became a costly and slow-going endeavor for the Johnson administration by late 1965. North Vietnam matched all troop increases by the United States, and the continued barrage of airstrikes appeared to have little success in disrupting supply transfers from North Vietnam to the Viet Cong guerillas in South Vietnam. As 1965 wore on, it began to appear that the influx of ground forces had failed to meet its aims of forcing the North Vietnamese into peace negotiations. Johnson’s military advisors recommended sending

even more troops. General William Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, requested a force of 410,000 troops by the following July, more than doubling December 1965 troop levels—plainly a politically impossible move for Johnson.¹ Such an increase would have required a massive mobilization effort unthinkable for Johnson: a Presidential declaration of a national emergency, and (crucially for Johnson) a Congressional shift of focus from passing Great Society reforms to implementing measures for maintaining a wartime economy. Johnson had rejected these options in July 1965, and he did so again that December.

The air strikes, begun in earnest in February 1965, also had failed to meet their objectives. In a December 17 meeting, George Ball, Undersecretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, argued: “We started bombing: 1) to raise morale; 2) to interdict supplies; 3) to get Hanoi to change its mind. The first is not needed anymore. Bombing hasn’t served the other two reasons... Obviously we are not breaking the will of North Vietnam. They are digging in... bombing never wins a war.”² The escalation seemed to be setting the stage for an ugly, protracted war, rather than a rapid victory. Importantly for the Johnson administration, few Americans foresaw a lengthy involvement in Vietnam. In a December 1965 Gallup Poll, a plurality of respondents believed the fighting would be over within two years.³ The nation remained unprepared for a sustained, expensive war in Vietnam. Johnson and his advisors recognized the need either to prepare the people for a lengthy engagement, or to find a way to end American involvement in the conflict.

¹Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms, A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 340. Calculations are based on “Total U.S. Military Personnel in South Vietnam,” U.S., Department of Defense, OASD (Comptroller), Directorate for Information. Table reproduced in George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 182.

²“Meeting of December 17, 1965, Cabinet Room. Present: President. Rusk, McNamara, [McGeorge] Bundy. Ball, Valenti” in David M. Barrett, ed., *Lyndon B. Johnson’s Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 287-288;

³ *Survey by Gallup Organization, December 11-December 16, 1965*. Retrieved March 8, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ipoll.html>>.

Johnson and his advisors began to consider moves for peace, particularly a bombing pause over North Vietnam. The Soviet Union had communicated to the United States that Hanoi would not negotiate while the bombing continued, so any hope for negotiations demanded the consideration of a bombing pause.⁴ The administration disagreed sharply on the issue. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy strongly supported a bombing halt, coupled with a major diplomatic offensive. McNamara supported the pause primarily in terms of the military situation: the military option had yielded unsatisfactory results, therefore he considered a push for peace negotiations desirable.⁵ Bundy, on the other hand, endorsed the bombing pause not because of any possibility for negotiations, but because it would establish “our own good faith as peace lovers” to the American people and to the world.⁶ This perspective would prove highly influential with Johnson.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, according to Johnson, went “through the roof” whenever he mentioned the pause to them. The Joint Chiefs believed the pause would allow North Vietnam to pour troops and supplies into South Vietnam without inhibition, and Johnson generally agreed.⁷ Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge also opposed the bombing halt. Lodge argued that a push for negotiations would undermine what he perceived as increasing stability in South Vietnam.⁸ Further, Lodge did not think the conflict could be solved through negotiations.⁹

The decision for a bombing pause, however, had implications beyond the military theater of Vietnam. By the fall of 1965, it had taken on a life of its own in the domestic political theater

⁴ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 679. See also “Vietnam Bombing Pause,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1965, p. 40.

⁵ Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 152.

⁶ Quoted in Bird, *Color of Truth*, 342.

⁷ “Meeting of December 17, 1965, Cabinet Room. Present: President, Rusk, McNamara, [McGeorge] Bundy, Ball, Valenti,” in Barrett, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 288. Woods, *LBJ*, 680.

⁸ “Vietnam Bombing Pause,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1965, p. 40.

⁹ Woods, *LBJ*, 680.

of the United States, with Senator J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as the protagonist. In an interview on NBC's Meet the Press on October 24, 1965, Fulbright urged a new suspension of bombings "for a more reasonable time," than earlier pauses.¹⁰ Fulbright's statements implied that the Johnson administration had failed to truly give peace negotiations a chance. Newspapers the next day highlighted Fulbright's comments, and reporters questioned Johnson's press secretary Bill Moyers about the issue the next day. After Moyers's response that there was "no indication that another cessation" would "lead to negotiations for a peaceful settlement," bold "Rejection" headlines hit the front pages.¹¹ As a result, the decision about the pause had become enmeshed in a domestic political conversation; the administration's decision would communicate whether or not Johnson truly desired a peaceful resolution in Vietnam.

The *New York Times* took up the cause, publishing a lengthy editorial supporting Fulbright's position. The editorial perceptively noted the two reasons to implement the pause rapidly: (1) the "optimum time" to negotiate with North Vietnam may be passing, and (2) the time to indicate to the American people of America's peaceful purpose in Vietnam may also be passing: "When there are 200,000 American troops in Vietnam and casualties rise, it will be harder to make aroused Americans understand that this is a limited war for limited objectives."¹² Instituting a bombing pause was therefore necessary to convince Americans of the "limited" nature of the war, as well as to express peaceful intentions. The editorial concluded by depicting the primacy of the rhetorical component, independent of practical results:

More than words are needed now.... Another pause in the bombing in North Vietnam, whether or not it succeeded, would be the best demonstration that the purpose of all our

¹⁰ "Fulbright Pleads Anew on Air Raids," *New York Times*, October 25, 1965, p. 3.

¹¹ Robert Young, "Reject Halt in Viet Raids," *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1965, p. 1. "Johnson's Stand on Vietnam Raids is Affirmed Again," *New York Times*, October 26, 1965, p. 1

¹² "Vietnam Bombing Pause," *New York Times*, November 1, 1965, p. 40.

military effort in Southeast Asia is aimed at speeding an honorable settlement. And it might even open the road to peace.¹³

For the administration, the phrase “whether or not it succeeded” mattered a great deal, but Johnson recognized the rhetorical import of the decision. During internal discussions about the bombing pause, Johnson stated: “We must evaluate this very carefully. You have no idea how much I’ve talked to the Fulbrights and Lippmanns.”¹⁴ Johnson clearly carefully considered how this decision would play with the public, chiefly as distilled through the perspectives of opinion leaders such as Fulbright and Lippmann. Due to Fulbright’s open confrontation with the administration concerning the bombing pause and Johnson’s engagement with Fulbright on this issue, the decision for the bombing pause would be both given and received rhetorically—that is, as an attempt to communicate and persuade the audience (the American public) of certain virtues in Johnson’s conduct of the war.

The final decision to implement the bombing pause focused on two points: (1) the likelihood of actually bringing North Vietnam to the bargaining table, and (2) demonstrating to the American public, and to the world, that the United States had explored all alternatives to waging war in Vietnam. All advisors expressed doubt that North Vietnam would actually come to the table, although even hardliners admitted there was a chance—however infinitesimal—that the pause plus the peace offensive could bring peace. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, in a meeting of Johnson’s foreign policy advisors, asserted that there was a 1 in 20 chance that the pause might bring a settlement—and that this was worth it. A small chance for negotiation coupled with the rhetorical effect domestically made the bombing pause desirable. “You must think about

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ “Meeting of December 17, 1965, Cabinet Room. Present: President, Rusk, McNamara, [McGeorge] Bundy, Ball, Valenti,” Barrett, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 287. Walter Lippmann, a highly-regarded op-ed writer for the *Washington Post*, frequently criticized Johnson’s foreign policies, particularly in Vietnam. In late 1965, he strongly criticized Johnson’s lack of viable peace initiatives for Vietnam. He also occasionally aligned himself with Fulbright’s foreign policy perspective. See “Today and Tomorrow: Soviet-American Relations,” *Washington Post*, September 28, 1965, A15; and “Today and Tomorrow: The Reckoning Begins,” *Washington Post*, December 21, 1965, A19.

the morale of the American people if the other side keeps pushing,” Rusk stated. “We must be able to say that *all* has been done.”¹⁵

United States forces implemented the bombing pause on Christmas Eve 1965. After a few days with no reply from North Vietnam and some scattered attacks by the Viet Cong, Johnson considered resuming the bombing, but ultimately he held back. With the popular bombing pause in place, the President had acquired significant political capital. He intended to employ this capital to propose an ambitious legislative agenda in his State of the Union Address on January 12, as well as to promote deeper commitments in Vietnam later in January.

In early January, Johnson turned his attention to the State of the Union Address and the promotion of a new set of domestic reforms. Having communicated a commitment to peace through the continued bombing pause, he had deferred questions of escalation, and had created a context for the State of the Union in which he could focus on Great Society programs and the liberation Vietnam from “Communist aggression” concurrently.

“A Civilization to Liberate the Spirit of Man”: The 1966 State of the Union Address

The State of the Union Address itself was colossal in size and scope. More than 5,000 words long (divided into five sections), it included domestic proposals covering nearly every aspect of society and still managed to devote more than half of its content to the war in Vietnam. Addressing the nation at 9:04p.m., Johnson’s first statement beyond the formalities acknowledged the crucial role of Vietnam, and summarized the primary theme of the speech:

Our Nation tonight is engaged in a brutal and bitter conflict in Vietnam. Later on I want to discuss that struggle in some detail with you. It just must be the center of our concerns. But we will not permit those who fire upon us in Vietnam to win a victory over the desires and the intentions of all the American people. This nation is mighty enough, its

¹⁵ “Notes of the President’s meeting of with foreign policy advisors, December 18, 1965.” Barrett, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 291.

society is healthy enough, its people are strong enough, to pursue our goals in the rest of the world while still building a Great Society here at home.¹⁶

Despite noting that Vietnam “must be the center of our concerns,” these opening statements subordinate “that struggle” to the creation of “a Great Society here at home.” In fact, after these opening phrases, Johnson launched into a list of legislative recommendations unrelated to Vietnam, and astonishing in breadth: continuing health and education programs passed in 1965; implementing a new direction for the United States’ foreign aid program; improving conditions for trade between the U.S. and the Soviet bloc; rebuilding urban areas around the country; cleaning up polluted rivers and waterways; building up Federal law enforcement to better deal with crime; ensuring nondiscrimination in jury selection and in access to housing; creating a streamlined, cabinet-level Department of Transportation; and amending the Constitution to extend the term of members of the House of Representatives from two years to four years.¹⁷

Johnson elaborated on the “guns and butter” reconciliation in the address by acknowledging constraints on the Great Society: “Because of Vietnam we cannot do all that we should, or all that we would like to do.”¹⁸ Despite the limitations, Johnson promised to improve governmental efficiency, cutting costs wherever possible, in order “to meet the needs of our people by continuing to develop the Great Society.”¹⁹ In fact, Johnson estimated the 1966 federal deficit at only \$1.8 billion. Total spending would equal \$112.8 billion, and total revenue—according to Johnson—would reach \$111 billion. After depicting the economic viability of staying the course in Vietnam and in the Great Society, Johnson made a stirring moral appeal:

I have not come here tonight to ask for pleasant luxuries or for idle pleasures. I have come here to recommend that you, the representatives of the richest Nation on earth, you,

¹⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, January 12, 1966,” *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 3. Hereafter cited as *PPP: LBJ, 1966*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

the elected servants of a people who live in abundance unmatched on this globe, you bring the most urgent decencies of life to all of your fellow Americans.

This statement was greeted with raucous applause by the Democratic majority. Johnson proceeded to address critics of his administration with a series of passionate rhetorical questions:

There are men who cry out: We must sacrifice. Well, let us rather ask them: Who will they sacrifice? Are they going to sacrifice the children who seek the learning, or the sick who need medical care, or the families who dwell in squalor now brightened by the hope of home? Will they sacrifice opportunity for the distressed, the beauty of our land, the hope of our poor? Time may require further sacrifices. And if it does, then we will make them. But we will not heed those who wring it from the hopes of the unfortunate here in a land of plenty. I believe that we can continue the Great Society while we fight in Vietnam.

Johnson therefore interpreted calls for “sacrifice” at home for Vietnam as an attempt by Republican legislators to interrupt the barrage of Great Society and War on Poverty programs moving through Congress. Appealing to moral sentiment by depicting Republicans as willing to sacrifice the well-being of poor Americans served to support Johnson’s domestic programs as well as to negate calls for more domestic wartime sacrifice.

Johnson delineated a conceptual framework of “liberation” to justify both his domestic and foreign policy proposals. In sweeping, even messianic, terms Johnson defined “liberation” as using “our success for the fulfillment of our lives.” The Great Society, as a result, consisted of “a society which spurs [the people] to the fullness of their genius.”²⁰ In Johnson’s words:

The third path is the path of liberation. It is to use our success for the fulfillment of our lives. A great nation is one which breeds a great people. A great people flower not from wealth and power, but from a society which spurs them to the fullness of their genius. That alone is a Great Society. Yet, slowly, painfully, on the edge of victory, has come the knowledge that shared prosperity is not enough. In the midst of abundance modern man walks oppressed by forces which menace and confine the quality of his life, and which individual abundance alone will not overcome. We can subdue and we can master these forces—bring increased meaning to our lives—if all of us. Government and citizens, are bold enough to change old ways, daring enough to assault new dangers, and if the dream is dear enough to call forth the limitless capacities of this great people.²¹

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

Bound up in this statement on liberation are a theory of human nature and human progress and a useful conceptual connection to the administration's justifications for engagement in Vietnam. First, the approach to humanity depicted "man" as enduring oppression by malignant structural forces but capable of overcoming them through knowledge, courage, imagination, and a practical trust in "the limitless capacities" of the community. Harnessing this capacity, and breaking through the forces confining human development, constituted the "path of liberation" in Johnson's utopian Great Society.

Second, Johnson's "liberation" concept connected the Great Society to Vietnam policy. Johnson depicted the struggle in Vietnam as a continuation of prior policy, as essential to the national interest and as a crucial component for Johnson's vision of "liberation":

Tonight the cup of peril is full in Vietnam. That conflict is not an isolated episode, but another great event in the policy that we have followed with strong consistency since World War II. The touchstone of that policy is the interest of the United States—the welfare and the freedom of the people of the United States. But nations sink when they see that interest through a narrow glass. In a world that has grown small and dangerous, pursuit of narrow aims could bring decay and even disaster. An America that is mighty beyond description—yet living in a hostile or despairing world—would be neither safe nor free to build *a civilization to liberate the spirit of man*.²²

The Great Society legislation program Johnson had endorsed apparently extended beyond the borders of the United States. Johnson did not say that international conditions would affect the liberation of *Americans*, but that a "hostile or despairing world" would prevent America from liberating *mankind*. The tone was overtly messianic, and perhaps paternalistic—that is, an attitude that America had the solution for the liberation of all other peoples.

Johnson closely associated "liberation" with "self-determination." For example, he affirmed that "we fight for the principle of self-determination—that the people of South Vietnam

²² *Ibid.*, 7. Emphasis added.

should choose their own course...’’²³ At one point, Johnson described self-determined societies as “shaped from the genius of [its] people.’’²⁴ This description echoes the “path of liberation” from the Great Society section of the speech, when Johnson spoke of “a society which spurs [the people] to the fullness of their genius.’’²⁵

For Johnson, defending the “self-determination” of the people of Vietnam resulted from the same principles which compelled him to promote the Great Society in the United States. In fact, these principles led Johnson to suggest that Vietnam should eventually pursue similar aims to the Great Society:

The people of Vietnam, North and South, seek the same things: *the shared needs of man*, the needs for food and shelter and education—the chance to build and work and till the soil, free from the arbitrary horrors of battle—the desire to walk in the dignity of those who master their own destiny.²⁶

The needs of “the people of Vietnam” substantially reflected the proposals of Johnson for America in 1966: shelter (nondiscrimination in access to housing), education (Teacher Corps), “the chance to build and work and till the soil” (employment initiatives and rural development programs)—even working “free from the arbitrary horrors of battle” (attacking crime and lawlessness because the American people “have a right to feel secure in their homes and on their streets”).²⁷

In reconciling the military venture in Vietnam to the proposals for a Great Society, Johnson extended “liberation”—and the theory of human nature associated with it—to Americans and to the Vietnamese. The 1966 State of the Union presented proposals for the “state of humanity.” Indeed, Johnson concluded by saying: “The work must be our work now. Scarred

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

by the weaknesses of man, with whatever guidance God may offer us, we must nevertheless and alone with our mortality, strive *to ennoble the life of man on earth.*"²⁸

The emphases on ennobling "the life of man on earth," self-determination, and liberation, combined to create a rhetoric of universal mission in the speech. To reconcile "guns and butter" conceptually, Johnson extended the principles behind development and "the good life" to the rest of the world. The applications of this rhetoric of universal mission included social, economic, and structural reform programs at home, as well as international development and defense of "self-determination" abroad. The universal mission helped rhetorically to resolve the "guns and butter" tension, but it did not fully account for continued military involvement in Vietnam.

Therefore, Johnson presented a panoply of justifications beyond the "principle of self-determination." First, Johnson again spoke of the continuity of American policy after World War II. Vietnam, for Johnson, "is not an isolated episode, but another great event in the policy we have followed with strong consistency since World War II."²⁹ The speech integrates continuity into the Cold War narrative by describing similar stands against Communism, both non-military (Greece, Turkey, and Berlin), and military (Korea, the Formosa Straits, Cuba, and Vietnam) in nature. Regarding the military actions, Johnson claimed Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy as forerunners who shaped the policy Johnson himself followed.

Second, Johnson defended involvement in Vietnam based on pledges and commitments to South Vietnam made in the past. As in previous addresses, Johnson drew from the actions of previous presidents. A nation which pursues justice should not renege on these commitments, Johnson argued: "We will stay [in Vietnam] because a just nation cannot leave to the cruelties of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

its enemies a people who have staked their lives and independence on America's solemn pledge—a pledge which has grown through the commitments of three American presidents."³⁰ This justification blended the general foreign policy continuity argument with specific policies toward Vietnam, and added a moral imperative that a "just nation" must prove the value of its pledges. The moral imperative for a "just nation" also led to a sense of fatalism for Johnson regarding Vietnam. Near the end of the speech, Johnson again summarized his desire for domestic reform, but concluded, with a resigned air: "Yet we do what we must."³¹

A third justification for continued involvement in Vietnam consisted of the defense of the national interest of the United States. Johnson stated that "nations sink when they see that interest through a narrow glass. In a world that has grown small and dangerous, pursuit of narrow aims could bring decay and even disaster."³² That is, with the onset of globalization and the spread of nuclear weapons technology, the United States needed to broaden the conception of its "national interest." Conflicts such as Vietnam might not have attracted much attention in an earlier age, when the United States pursued a "narrower" national interest. The implication is that taking a limited stand in Vietnam could prevent the need to wage an unlimited war with China or the Soviet Union. This aspect of the argument became crucial to Johnson's Vietnam war justifications by 1967.

Finally, Johnson defended America's involvement in Vietnam by constructing a narrative of conquest prevention in Vietnam. The speech depicted the South Vietnam of the late 1950s as struggling "to build a nation, with the friendly help of the United States," while North Vietnam, after an internal Communist movement in the South failed to come to power, "decided on

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

conquest.”³³ Johnson framed America’s position this way: “As the assault mounted, our choice gradually became clear. We could leave, abandoning South Vietnam to its attackers and to certain conquest, or we could stay and fight beside the people of South Vietnam.”³⁴ Fighting North Vietnam became, therefore both an attempt to stem Communist aggression and a paternalistic venture by the United States. Without American help, South Vietnam would face “certain conquest.” according to Johnson. An irony at this point was that South Vietnam could only achieve “independence” and self-determination by *depending* upon American determination and military power.

Johnson was often accused during the war in Vietnam of a “credibility gap”—a disparity between his rhetoric and reality on the ground. A notable characteristic of the 1966 State of the Union address, however, is the candor with which Johnson spoke. Regarding the financial cost of Vietnam, Johnson clearly stated his willingness to seek increased expenditures or taxes: “if the necessities of Vietnam require it, I will not hesitate to return to the Congress for additional appropriations, or additional revenues if they are needed.”³⁵ Neither did he disguise the possibility that American involvement in Vietnam could become costly: “And let me be absolutely clear: The days may become months, and the months may become years, but we will stay as long as aggression commands us to battle.”³⁶ For a President so frequently accused of disguising economic and military realities, this speech displayed commendable forthrightness with the American people.

As established previously, the underlying context for Johnson’s treatment of Vietnam in the speech was the bombing pause, instituted Christmas Eve 1965. Johnson elaborated at length

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11

on America's efforts for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. "Our decision to stand firm has been matched by our desire for peace," Johnson affirmed.³⁷ This speech emphasized two aspects of peace process. First, Johnson clarified America's aims: "We seek neither territory nor bases, economic domination or military alliance in Vietnam. We fight for the principle of self-determination..."³⁸ This statement attempted to assure North Vietnam, China, and the USSR that the United States had no colonial or territorial ambition in Southeast Asia. Second, Johnson proclaimed the absence of "arbitrary limits to our search for peace...we will consider the views of any group. We will work for a cease-fire now or once discussions have begun. We will respond if others reduce their use of force..."³⁹ This statement opened the possibility for negotiating with the Vietcong, as well as the reduction of hostilities by a mutual de-escalation, rather than a formal cease-fire.⁴⁰

In summary, Johnson's 1966 State of the Union synthesized grand legislative plans, justifications for war, hopes for peace, and intentions for international development—tying much of it together with a theory of human nature based on a dialectic between oppression and "liberation." Johnson also presented other justifications for war, demonstrated candor and honesty with the American people, and publicized his attempts for reaching a peaceful settlement in Vietnam.

Mixed Results

Johnson's speech received a wide variety of responses. Joseph Califano later wrote that Johnson "electrified the Joint Session of the House and the Senate," noting that he was

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁰ "The State of Vietnam," *New York Times*, January 14, 1966, p. 38. Roscoe Drummond, "New Peace Route... Will Hanoi Go for De-escalation?" *Washington Post*, January 14, 1966, A18.

interrupted by applause fifty-nine times.⁴¹ President Johnson's wife, Lady Bird, however, perceived a lack of support in the responses by the speech's live audience. She interpreted the waning support as a natural oscillation in the political process. In her diary entry on the evening of the address, she used the State of the Union Addresses as landmarks for analyzing this pattern. For Johnson's first State of the Union, in 1964, the president was riding "on the tidal wave of emotion" following the assassination of President Kennedy. In 1965, Johnson was "on the crest of the great victory" in the election the previous November. In 1966, however, Lady Bird hypothesized that "maybe we are in the trough of a wave."⁴²

Press editorials also offered a diversity of responses. The *Washington Post* offered a fully supportive review of the speech, asserting: "The President was right to make it clear that we do not have to choose between the abandonment of our commitments abroad and the desertion of objectives at home. The country has the means to fulfill its obligations to its own people and to the people it has promised to defend in Vietnam."⁴³

The *Chicago Tribune*, on the other hand, printed a partisan diatribe against Johnson in response to the speech. The editorial questioned Johnson's motives, saying that "Mr. Johnson is not a prophet...He may talk of Utopia, but it is well to remember that he is looking for votes."⁴⁴ After criticizing the speech point by point, the editorial concluded that Johnson's proposals threaten "the liberties of the people and the survival of the Republic."⁴⁵

The *New York Times* printed two editorials concerning the speech, one focusing on the peace proposals and calling the war in Vietnam a "stalemate"; and one offering a mixed review of the speech. "President Johnson's State of the Union message was an eloquent but troubled

⁴¹ Califano, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 118.

⁴² Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 350-351.

⁴³ "The State of the War," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1966, A16.

⁴⁴ "Johnson Can Get It For You Wholesale," *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1966, p. 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8

rendering of the contradictory situation in which the country finds itself,” the editorial began. It called Johnson’s discussion of war and peace “balanced,” and agreed with the *Washington Post*’s position on “guns and butter”: Johnson was right to point out that “the United States is rich enough and strong enough to act responsibly both at home and abroad.” Regarding domestic policy, the *Times* called Johnson’s civil rights recommendations “excellent,” but criticized Johnson’s other proposals as “in some cases a bit too much,” and wonders whether Johnson’s approach to “tax and budget decisions is really bold enough.”⁴⁶

The public’s response to a State of the Union Address is always difficult to gauge. However, a Gallup poll conducted from January 21-26, 1966 posed the following question: “In his recent state of the union speech to Congress the President (Johnson) said that despite the cost of the war in Vietnam the administration would continue its programs for federal aid to education, medical care, cleaning up water pollution the war against poverty and other Great Society programs. How do you feel about this—do you think the government should continue to pay for these programs here at home, or do you feel they should be cut back to help finance the war in Vietnam?” Fifty-eight percent of respondents believed that the Government should continue to pay here, while only twenty-five percent wanted the government to cut back. In the same poll, fifty-seven percent also approved of Johnson’s handling of the situation in Vietnam, and sixty-one percent approved of Johnson’s handling of his job as President.⁴⁷ While the direct impact of the speech cannot be ascertained, Johnson still maintained broad support for his policy balance between Vietnam and the Great Society.

⁴⁶ “The State of the Union,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1966, p. 24.

⁴⁷ *Survey by Gallup Organization, January 21-January 26, 1966*. Retrieved March 8, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank. The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ipoll.html>>.

Conclusion

Domestic policy and foreign policy came into direct conflict in December 1965-January 1966 for President Lyndon Johnson. The Christmas Eve bombing pause responded to this conflict, and set the stage for the State of the Union Address on January 12. That ambitious speech aimed at reconciling domestic aims with foreign policy necessities. Amid a wide array of justifications for his Vietnam and Great Society policies, Johnson focused on abstract concepts such as “liberation” and human nature to achieve that aim. Finally, the rhetorical moves had mixed success, with varied reviews in the process, but a healthy margin of polled Americans supporting the President. The high approval ratings for Johnson would be short-lived, however, as the conflict in Vietnam became more costly and protracted.

Chapter 4: Protesters, Public Opinion, and Peace

Throughout 1966 and 1967, a domestic-foreign conflict of a different type developed, in the form of domestic dissatisfaction with Johnson's Vietnam policies. In early 1966, Johnson had concerned himself with simultaneously holding the line in Vietnam and promoting progressive domestic reforms. As discontent grew among both "hawks" and "doves," and as peace protests became more frequent, Johnson found himself attempting to hold the line in the United States at least as much as in Vietnam. In addition, the Johnson administration engaged in countless diplomatic actions and attempts to initiate negotiations with North Vietnam. By the fall of 1967, Johnson's rhetoric included assessments of dissent and diplomacy, particularly in a Vietnam policy speech in San Antonio in September and in a landmark press conference in November. Johnson aggressively addressed the concerns of domestic dissidents, and candidly put forth diplomatic initiatives. This chapter examines the content and context of this rhetoric, emphasizing the rising importance of the domino theory in Johnson's public pronouncements about Vietnam.

This chapter sets forth the primary exigencies of Johnson's Fall 1967 rhetoric domestically: declining public opinion, a rising war toll, and an active, well-connected protest movement. This was a volatile period, and declining public opinion placed further limits on the limited war in Vietnam. Public opinion posed a problem for Johnson's rhetoric in that it was the most fundamental key to victory in Vietnam. Persuading the people of the justice of the cause in Vietnam was necessary for Johnson to maintain the limited war in Vietnam at all. The first section commences with a careful study of survey results from 1966 and 1967 to approximate the status of broad American public opinion at this time concerning Vietnam. The peace and Vietnam protest movements are then noted—including the October 1967 March on the

Pentagon—with an emphasis on the Johnson administration’s response to them. The chapter then details the status of diplomatic efforts before analyzing Johnson’s speech at San Antonio and his press conference of November 17, 1967. These pronouncements marked a shift in Johnson’s rhetorical posture, and displayed an overt, concentrated effort to win over dissenters to Johnson’s perspective concerning Vietnam.

Growing Discontent

Following the 1966 State of the Union Address, Johnson enjoyed broad support for his concurrent pursuit of “guns and butter.” This support in the polls proved stable, with majorities of 58% in April 1966, 54% in March 1967, and 64% by December 1967 all opposed to reducing domestic programs because of Vietnam.¹ However, approval for Johnson’s use of the “guns” steadily declined. After the 1966 State of the Union Address, approval for Johnson’s handling of the situation in Vietnam stood at 57%, with only 28% disapproving.² This margin gradually narrowed throughout 1966, until December of that year, when a plurality of 47% expressed disapproval for Johnson’s handling of Vietnam, with 42% approving.³ Johnson’s handling of Vietnam had permanently lost approval in the polls.⁴ Public disapproval climaxed in September 1967—just ten days before the address at San Antonio—with 58% disapproving and a mere 29%

¹ *Survey by Louis Harris & Associates, April, 1966*. Retrieved April 16, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> (hereafter cited as: “Roper Center, iPOLL.”) *Survey by Louis Harris & Associates, March, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL. *Survey by Louis Harris & Associates, December, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL.

² *Survey by Gallup Organization, January 21-26, 1966*, Roper Center, iPOLL.

³ *Survey by Gallup Organization, December 8-13, 1966*. Roper Center, iPOLL.

⁴ There are two fairly insignificant exceptions to this. In April 1967, a poll registered 43% approval and 42% disapproval (obviously within the margin of error), and in June 1967, a poll registered an equal 43% approval and 43% disapproval. Despite these anomalies, disapproval became the norm after December 1966. *Survey by Gallup Organization, April 19-24, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL. *Survey by Gallup Organization, June 22-27, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL.

approving of Johnson's Vietnam policies.⁵ This was a complete reversal of the approval ratings of January 1966, from 57% approving to 58% disapproving after a 20-month interval.

While specific causes for the decline in support for Johnson's policies in Vietnam cannot be ascertained, the growing numbers of American casualties in Vietnam likely had some impact. Domestic news reports announced daily American losses, and the numbers were rising at a disturbing rate. During the early stages, casualties had been relatively low, with 204 soldiers killed in 1964 and 1,863 in 1965. In 1966 and 1967, these numbers increased exponentially, with 6,143 and 11,153 servicemen killed, respectively.⁶ At the same time, the country received few reports of major military gains in Vietnam. The increasing losses and apparent lack of returns combined to form a major rhetorical problem for Johnson. The public impression of a stalemate was difficult for Johnson to deflect.

Another potential cause for the decline in public support, and which was closely watched by the Johnson administration, was the press' depiction of conditions on the ground in Vietnam. A prominent instance of this occurred in early 1967, when Harrison Salisbury of *The New York Times* traveled to North Vietnam from December 23, 1966-January 7, 1967. Upon his return, Salisbury published nearly two dozen articles reporting appallingly destructive effects of American bombing on the civilian population of North Vietnam.⁷ Salisbury's reports gave a "dramatic shot in the arm" to peace movements.⁸ William Bundy, Johnson's Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, later noted that "the horrendous stories and the whole

⁵ Survey by Gallup Organization, September 14-19, 1967, Roper Center, iPOLL.

⁶The National Archives and Records Administration, "Statistical Information about Casualties of the Vietnam Conflict: Southeast Asia Combat Area Casualties Current File Record Counts by Year of Death or Declaration of Death." <<http://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#intro>> (accessed April 16, 2007).

⁷ United States Department of State, "Editorial Note," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume V: Vietnam, 1967*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2002), 8.

⁸ Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 96.

kind of thing that Salisbury created and all the rest...really did play an immense part in shortening the fuse of public support in this country.”⁹

Based on the high casualties and the nature of press reports, one might conjecture that the American people desired peace at any cost, including withdrawal from Vietnam. Poll data from this period, however, indicated otherwise. If anything, public opinion pressured Johnson to intensify military operations in Vietnam, particularly during 1966 and much of 1967. In March 1966, a plurality of respondents considered themselves “hawks” concerning Vietnam, and by December 1967 that number had risen to 52%.¹⁰ Respondents also favored increasing the strength of its attacks on North Vietnam over beginning to withdraw U.S. forces, by 50% to 32% in August 1967, and 53% to 31% in October 1967, shortly after the San Antonio speech.¹¹

Perhaps the most telling statistic in this respect concerns the peace movement. The Gallup Organization in April 1967 asked respondents whether they had ever attended a peace rally on Vietnam. Ninety-nine percent said they had not, and among that group, only 9% said they would like to participate in one.¹² These questions were asked just days after a demonstration by 100,000 protesters in New York on April 15, 1967. Participants in the peace movement in 1967 constituted a tiny fraction of the American population, and much of the public disapproved of their activities. But the protesters were a well-educated, firmly committed, and strategically shrewd group, and they became a force on the domestic political scene. In addition, many of them were eligible to be drafted and sent to Vietnam, lending an effective emotional component to their statements and demonstrations. Both the broader public, and the smaller peace movement affected Johnson’s rhetoric in the fall of 1967.

⁹ William Bundy Oral History, June 2, 1969, Lyndon B. Johnson Library (hereafter cited as OH, LBJL).

¹⁰ *Survey by Gallup Organization, March 24-29, 1966*, Roper Center, iPOLL. *Survey by Gallup Organization, December 7-12, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL.

¹¹ *Survey by Gallup Organization, October 6-11, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL.

¹² *Survey by Gallup Organization, April 19-24, 1967*, Roper Center, iPOLL.

Likely the most dramatic event in the history of the 1960s peace movement—and the immediate context for Johnson’s November 17, 1967 press conference—was the March on the Pentagon, the grand finale of the national Stop the Draft week of October 1967.¹³ The Johnson administration was concerned about this demonstration, and planned for the defense of the Pentagon, the White House, and the Capitol from early October. They even formed a task force, headed by Warren Christopher, which met periodically to prepare for the protest.¹⁴ President Johnson had planned on issuing a statement in advance of the protest that he had “instructed all governmental authorities charged with the responsibility in this matter to see that the law of the land is obeyed and enforced.” He refrained from commenting on the protest, however, perceiving that such a statement would grant the protesters extra publicity and would only generate additional controversy.¹⁵

Nearly 100,000 protesters gathered near the Lincoln Memorial on October 21, 1967, and the next day approximately 35,000 of them marched on the Pentagon. A small group broke away from the mass, and managed to break into the Pentagon before being captured.¹⁶ There were multiple violent clashes between protesters and Pentagon guards, and in the end nearly 700 marchers were arrested after U.S. marshals moved in with tear gas and clubs to clear the entrance to the Pentagon.¹⁷ The protesters were assailed in the public arena; they were depicted as encouraging “chaos and anarchy,” and of doing a “disservice” to “a free society.”¹⁸ *The*

¹³ George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 209.

¹⁴ Notes of the President’s Meeting with Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Mr. Rostow, CIA Director Helms, and George Christian, October 3, 1967, in David M. Barrett, ed., *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 481.

¹⁵ Joseph A. Califano. *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 199.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 209. Joseph A. Loftus, “Guards Repulse War Protesters at the Pentagon,” *New York Times*, October 22, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ben A. Franklin, “War Protesters Defying Deadline Seized in Capital,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁸ “LBJ Hears ‘Bearded Oafs’ Assailed,” *Washington Post*, October 23, 1967, A1.

Washington Post called the march “a missed opportunity, a foolish failure.”¹⁹ The leaders of the protest groups admitted that days of “parades” were over, and that they had shifted their strategy to “confrontations” with the government.²⁰ Johnson, speaking at his press conference a few weeks later, decried such “storm trooper” activities, urging protesters to engage in more responsible dissent in their quest for peace. In summary, domestically, Johnson’s rhetoric of Fall 1967 faced up to three prominent problems: declining public opinion, the perception of rising costs and decreasing returns militarily, and a vocal and potentially violent protest movement.

Efforts for Peace, 1967

During this time Johnson himself engaged in an intensive quest for peace. Two primary efforts deserve attention: the “Marigold” initiative of 1966, and the “San Antonio Formula” initiative of mid to late-1967. In late 1966, the peace effort by Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski, code-named “Marigold,” began.²¹ Lewandowski formulated a ten-point plan, which he claimed had been based on statements by U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge. William Bundy later commented that Lodge had likely not been “talking on the theory that this would be put down in a Ten Commandments form,” and from the beginning the administration was highly skeptical about this peace initiative.²² Desiring not to appear too inflexible, however, the administration accepted the general idea of the initiative provided that “several specific points are subject to important differences of interpretation.” After much diplomatic wrangling, the U.S. bombed sites in Hanoi just days before scheduled negotiations, and the North Vietnamese backed out of the process altogether.²³

¹⁹ “The March: A Post-Mortem,” *Washington Post*, October 24, 1967, A14.

²⁰ John Kifner, “Marchers See a Shift from Dissent to Resistance,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1967, p. 32.

²¹ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 203.

²² William Bundy OH, June 2, 1969, LBJL.

²³ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 203-204.

In 1967, both the United States and the North Vietnamese softened their diplomatic stances. North Vietnam no longer insisted on their Four Points (which included the total withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam before negotiations could begin), and the United States withdrew their requirement that the North Vietnamese fully extract themselves from South Vietnam before talks could take place. Around this time, Professor Henry Kissinger of Harvard University met two men at an academic conference who had extensive connections in North Vietnam. He contacted the State Department about the possibility of utilizing this channel of communication, and after some deliberation, the administration decided in August 1967 to take this opportunity to arrange for negotiations.²⁴ At this time the Johnson administration—including Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Warnke, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, and Johnson himself—formulated what became known as the “San Antonio Formula.” As relayed to North Vietnam via Kissinger, the formula consisted of the following: “It [is] the understanding of the United States Government that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam [is] willing promptly to engage in productive discussions leading to peace when there was a cessation of aerial and naval bombardment.” The message also stated the United States’ assumption that “the Democratic Republic of Vietnam would not take advantage of such a cessation because to do so would be inconsistent with the objective of productive talks leading to peace.”²⁵ The diplomatic contacts in August and September 1967 displayed the potential for success. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara called one of North Vietnam’s responses “the most interesting message on [a] matter of negotiations which we have ever had,” and stated that “Kissinger is a tough, shrewd

²⁴ William Bundy OH, June 2, 1969, LBJL.

²⁵ Memorandum from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to Professor Henry Kissinger, September 12, 1967, in Barrett, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 478.

negotiator,” with North Vietnam.²⁶ These developments provided the immediate diplomatic context for the San Antonio speech.

San Antonio

On September 8, 1967, the Council of State Governments invited Johnson to speak at their National Legislative Conference on September 29,²⁷ and Johnson and his staff chose this address to be a major Vietnam policy statement. Drafts of the speech circulated through the White House for several days before the address, written and edited notably by National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, White House aide Horace Busby, and Harry McPherson—the Johnson adviser who, from the middle of 1966, was the “chief architect of all of Johnson speeches.”²⁸ Johnson himself edited a draft of the speech the day before it was to be delivered. In sum, a vast amount of effort and meticulous editing went into the creation of the San Antonio address. It was a major attempt to rally support for Vietnam policy, to respond to dissidents, and to explain and justify the administration’s actions.

The speech itself consists of two major parts—basically two speeches in one. Harry McPherson had been entrusted with drafting the first section, and Walt Rostow was mostly responsible for the second. The first section, aimed specifically at the general doubts about America’s involvement in Vietnam, is a carefully argued justification for America’s involvement in Vietnam, based on America’s own national and security interests. The second section answers

²⁶ Notes of the President’s Meeting with Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary Katzenbach, George Christian, Walt Rostow, and Joe Califano, at the Tuesday Luncheon, August 8, 1967, in Barrett, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 458.

²⁷ White House Central Files, Speech File: Letter, Herbert L. Wiltsee, Secretary of the Council of State Governments, to George Christian, Press Secretary to the President, September 8, 1967, Ex SP 3-200, Box 191, WHCF, LBJ Library.

²⁸ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 684.

three prominent questions about the Vietnam conflict, and contains the famous “San Antonio Formula.”

Near the beginning of the speech, Johnson framed the argument specifically in terms of the public’s doubts about Vietnam:

This evening I came here to speak to you about Vietnam. I do not have to tell you that our people are profoundly concerned about that struggle. There are passionate convictions about the wisest course for our Nation to follow. There are many sincere and patriotic Americans who harbor doubts about sustaining the commitment that three Presidents and a half a million of our young men have made. Doubts and debate are enlarged because the problems of Vietnam are quite complex...²⁹

The decision to include this acknowledgment was deliberate, and contested within the administration. Rostow, Katzenbach, Nitze, and Busby edited one of McPherson’s drafts of the speech on September 28 and chose to omit this portion in favor of offering definitions of the conflict. McPherson, in a memo to Johnson, responded: “Not including some mention of the doubts so many people feel about Vietnam is skirting the most obvious political truth about the situation. Beginning with standard definitions of the war is calculated to put your audience asleep. It has all been heard so many times before.”³⁰ Johnson chose to retain the recognition of widespread doubt about Vietnam policy. He and his staff intended this speech to face up to this “most obvious political truth” and present a new and more effective justification for their Vietnam policies.

Interestingly, however, Johnson chose not to retain the final part of that paragraph in McPherson’s draft, which stated: “If I could find a single phrase that would resolve those doubts, and unite all our people behind the course we are pursuing today, I would long since have spoken that phrase. But the struggle in Vietnam is complex. It will not yield to a single phrase—such as

²⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio Texas,” September 29, 1967, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 876. Hereafter cited as *PPP: LBJ, 1967*.

³⁰ Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, September 28, 1967. Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library.

‘escalation’ or ‘enclave theory’ or ‘civil war.’”³¹ These sentences implied an overt attempt to manipulate words to obtain the people’s support; the result of the omission is a smoother, more conceptual approach to justifying Johnson’s Vietnam policies. The sentences were essentially rhetoric *about* rhetoric, and amounted to an admission of past rhetorical failure. Johnson likely desired to focus on concepts and rhetoric that would persuade the public *now*, rather than on what he would have said in the past if it had been possible. The presence of these statements in a draft of the speech also denotes Johnson and his staff’s struggles in forming effective rhetorical strategies, as well as the intense desire of the administration to win the rhetorical war in the United States.

After noting widespread doubts in the American polity, Johnson described the tumultuous conditions in Vietnam, then established the primary conceptual justification for American involvement in Vietnam:

Into this mixture of subversion and war, of terror and hope. America has entered—with its material power and with its moral commitment. Why? Why should three Presidents and the elected representatives of our people have chosen to defend this Asian nation more than 10,000 miles from American shores? We cherish freedom—yes. We cherish self-determination for all people—yes...But *the key to all that we have done is really our own security.*³²

This was a major shift in Johnson’s public reasoning concerning Vietnam. Self-determination and liberation (particularly seen in the 1966 State of the Union address) had dominated Johnson’s rhetoric in the past. The grandiose terminology of striving “to ennoble the life of man on earth,”³³ had receded to a pursuit of national security interests. National security had been mentioned in earlier speeches, but it was not placed front and center rhetorically until the San Antonio speech. Johnson even seemed to downplay self-determination in this speech, by placing

³¹ Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, Attention: Jim Jones. September 28, 1967, Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library.

³² Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam,” *PPP: LBJ, 1967*. Vol. I, 876.

³³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union.” January 12, 1966, *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 12.

it in a list of values “we cherish,” but that are clearly subservient to “our own security.” Johnson and his staff believed that if no other justification could be effective in the public domain, America’s own security could still be successful. McPherson wrote to Johnson on a cover sheet for one of the final drafts of this speech: “The first half of the speech is devoted to the proposition that it is important for us to be in Vietnam *for our own security. I think that is the only justification people will buy now.*”³⁴

As in previous speeches, Johnson utilized in this address a justificatory narrative of continuity with previous presidents—and he integrated the “national security” argument into the continuity narrative retroactively.

At times of crisis—before asking Americans to fight and die to resist aggression in a foreign land—every American President has finally had to answer this question: Is the aggression a threat—not only to the immediate victim—but to the United States of America and to the peace and security of the entire world of which we in America are a very vital part? That is the question which Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson had to answer in facing the issue in Vietnam...For those who have borne the responsibility for decision during these past 10 years, the stakes to us have seemed clear—and have seemed high.³⁵

Three specific issues arise out of this part of the speech: (1) the potential for excessive commitments to collective security, (2) the shift from a “test” to a “question” in the formation of the text, and (3) the relation of the “stakes” to domino theory. These three issues correspond to three questions which logically follow from the text: (1) What was the extent of the possible applications of the “national security” justification? (2) How firm and definite was this as a policy standard? (3) In what way did Vietnam pose a threat to the national security of the United States?

First, the speech does not specify a limit for the application of “national security” as a justification for foreign policies. The nature of the question which—according to Johnson—

³⁴ Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, Attachment, September 28, 1967, 10:20a.m., Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library. Emphasis added.

³⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam,” *PPP: LBJ, 1967*, Vol. 1, 876.

Presidents must answer holds the potential for severe overextension. America should take action to defend its national security if an instance of aggression “is a threat...to the peace and security of the entire world.”³⁶ With this criterion, the United States could justify involvement in virtually any conflict around the world. Very few instances of aggression do not pose a threat to the “peace and security” of the world around them. In fact, based on this passage alone, the United States might be *obligated* to be involved in most conflicts around the world. Harry McPherson, commenting on the version of this passage in his original draft, asserted that it “is a reasonable test of action that makes us neither world policemen, nor ostriches.”³⁷ The speech, as delivered, suggests more of a “world policemen” interpretation.

The potential breadth of application is tempered by a weakened commitment to “national security” as a policy standard. In McPherson’s draft, this section was indeed a “test of action”, rather than “the question” which leaders had to “answer in facing the issue of Vietnam.” Johnson himself made this change while editing a draft of this speech on September 28, 1967. All of the language in this section was changed from “test” to “question.” The continuity-establishing sentence is a good example. McPherson’s draft stated: “[Our security] is *the test by which* Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy *must be judged.*” Johnson penciled in a different version: “[Our security] is *the question to which* Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson *had to respond in facing the issue of Vietnam.*”³⁸ McPherson’s “test” implied an immutable standard by which presidents “must be judged.” Johnson rejected this strong language, replacing it with a “question,” and made it more specific by adding “in facing the issue

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 876.

³⁷ Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, September 28, 1967, Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library.

³⁸ State Legislators’ Speech, attached to Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, September 28, 1967, Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library. Original transferred to Handwriting File. Emphasis added.

of Vietnam.” The “test” was unqualified, potentially applicable to all American foreign policy ventures. The final version of the speech used Johnson’s edit, with a minor grammatical change. Johnson’s editing of this portion of the speech significantly reduced its breadth of applicability and weakened its tone.

Third, the “stakes” that “have seemed high” for America’s national security, according to Johnson, were directly linked to the consequences for all of Southeast Asia—that is, to a form of the domino theory. At this point, the speech drastically departs in form from previous speeches. Johnson introduced a series of quotations from other leaders, beginning with Eisenhower’s words from 1959, and Kennedy’s in 1962 and 1963. The Eisenhower quotation refers to a “great flanking movement” which would menace “the remaining countries in Southeast Asia” if South Vietnam fell to the Communists.³⁹ The Kennedy quotations are similar, but draw in America’s commitment as well: American withdrawal from South Vietnam “might mean a collapse of the entire area.”⁴⁰

Johnson proceeded to “call the roll” of leaders in the “great arc of Asian and Pacific nations.” He quoted the President of the Philippines—American renunciation of “leadership in Asia is to allow the Red Chinese to gobble up all of Asia”—the Foreign Minister of Thailand, the Prime Minister of Australia, the President of Korea—“in our belief any aggression against the Republic of Vietnam represented a direct and grave menace to the security and peace of free Asia”—the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Prime Minister of New Zealand—“we can thank God” for America’s concern and action in Asia, and the Prime Minister of Singapore—“the fate

³⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam,” *PPP: LBJ, 1967*, Vol. 1, 876.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 877.

of Asia—South and Southeast Asia—will be decided in the next few years by what happens in Vietnam.”⁴¹

Johnson used these quotation to introduce a two-tiered system of consequences of the war in Vietnam. The first and most obvious concerned Southeast Asia. Johnson declared:

I cannot tell you tonight as your President—with certainty—that a Communist conquest of South Vietnam would be followed by a Communist conquest of Southeast Asia. Bud I do know there are North Vietnamese troops in Laos. I do know that there are North Vietnamese trained guerillas tonight in northeast Thailand. I do know that there are Communist-supported guerilla forces operating in Burma.⁴²

The leaders’ quotations, coupled with Johnson’s assertions of Communist guerilla movements, constituted the closest thing to an outright avowal of the domino theory Johnson would offer. Interestingly, he did not definitively predict that all of Southeast Asia would be overtaken by Communists if Vietnam fell—he merely stated that he could not say “with certainty” that it would *not* occur. The second tier of the Vietnam conflict’s consequences, Johnson stated, comprised nothing less than global security and the very survival of the American nation. This theory rested on assumptions gathered from World War II. Indeed, in a fashion structurally parallel to the previous quote, Johnson contended that failure in Vietnam could lead to World War III:

So your American President cannot tell you—with certainty—that a Southeast Asia dominated by Communist power would bring a *third world war* much closer to terrible reality. One could hope that this would not be so. But all that we have learned in this tragic century strongly suggests to me that it would be so.⁴³

The idea, apparently, was that once the Communists take over Vietnam, they would take over all of Southeast Asia; and once they had taken Southeast Asia, they would attack other surrounding areas, and so on. World War II served as the template for analyzing the situation in Vietnam. The original McPherson draft of the speech stated this explicitly, and is worth quoting in full:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 877-878.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 878.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 878.

I am convinced that by seeing this struggle through now, in Vietnam, we are reducing the chances of a major war--perhaps a nuclear war. For one of the most dependable lessons of history is, that "small" aggressions, if unchecked, can become major threats to peace. Those who permit them to go unchecked out of distaste for combat or because the battlefield is far away and full of complexities, often find themselves facing--not an Ethiopia or a Rhineland--but a blitz and a Buchenwald. I would rather stand in Vietnam, in our time, and by meeting this danger now, reduce the danger for our children and grandchildren.⁴⁴

Communist aggression in Vietnam was compared to German aggression in the Rhineland, and Italian aggression in Ethiopia in the early stages of World War II. By extension, allowing Vietnamese aggression to continue would potentially result in massive military actions against developed nations such as the blitz on London, or even unimaginable atrocities such as the concentration camp at Buchenwald. In this way, America's involvement in Vietnam (at least in McPherson's draft) possessed implications for global security. The address, as delivered, did not contain such vivid images, but it arrived at precisely the same conclusion as the McPherson draft text. America's national security depended on staying in Vietnam because a Communist Vietnam would lead to a Communist Southeast Asia, and a Communist Southeast Asia would lead to a (potentially nuclear) world war, in which the United States' very existence would be endangered.

The second half of the speech, written primarily by Walt Rostow, addressed three questions about America's involvement in Vietnam—questions frequently leveled by opponents of the war: (1) "Are the Vietnamese—with our help, and that of their other allies—really making progress? Is there a forward movement?"⁴⁵ (2) "Why not negotiate now?"⁴⁶ (3) "Why, in the face of military and political progress in the South, and the burden of our bombing in the North, do they insist and persist with the war?"⁴⁷ The first question comprised both political progress and

⁴⁴ "State Legislators' Speech," attached to Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, September 28, 1967, Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address on Vietnam." *PPP: LBJ, 1967*, Vol. I, 878.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 879.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 879.

military progress. Politically, Johnson presented successful elections, and the impending inauguration of “an elected Senate and Legislature” in South Vietnam.⁴⁸ Militarily, the phrasing was trickier, due to military struggles on the ground in Vietnam. As noted above, casualties had been increasing considerably, while major military gains had been sparse. The Rostow-Katzenbach-Nitze-Busby version of the speech of September 28 had proclaimed “dramatic progress” in the war. McPherson, in a memo to the President after reading that draft, suggested the insertion of the qualifying phrase. “considering the situation that prevailed in 1965.” McPherson continued, “Are we prepared to say there is dramatic progress going on right now? That will certainly make headlines and get us into a shooting match with correspondents out in Vietnam. Maybe we can win it. I hope we can.”⁴⁹ Ultimately, Johnson accepted the qualification. He did not admit a stalemate, but neither did he assert military progress. Comparing the situation to 1965 enabled Johnson to paint the conflict in more comfortably optimistic terms.

The second question, concerning negotiations, gave the speech instant notoriety as a diplomatic announcement. In answering this question, Johnson publicly announced for the first time the “San Antonio Formula.” In William Bundy’s words, on the 29th of September Johnson “confirmed San Antonio at San Antonio, you might say.”⁵⁰ Johnson’s precise phrasing was as follows:

As we have told Hanoi time and time and time again, the heart of the matter is really this: The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 878.

⁴⁹ Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, September 28, 1967, Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library.

⁵⁰ William Bundy OH, June 2, 1969, LBJL.

⁵¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam.” *LBJ: PPP, 1967*. Vol. I. 879.

This wording mirrored the wording of the private message to the North Vietnamese transmitted by Henry Kissinger. Regarding when the United States would be willing to do this, Johnson claimed: “I am ready to talk with Ho Chi Minh, and other chiefs of state concerned, tomorrow.”⁵² Johnson attempted to blame North Vietnam for the continuation of the conflict: “Hanoi has not accepted any of these proposals. So it is by Hanoi’s choice—and not ours, and not the rest of the world’s—that the war continues.”⁵³ These statements are somewhat misleading, however, as North Vietnam had not yet given a definitively negative response to the offer for negotiations. That occurred in mid-October, about two weeks after the delivery of the San Antonio speech.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the diplomatic aspect of the address received significant attention in the press. The front page of *The Washington Post* the next day proclaimed: “Johnson Puts Up Peace to Hanoi”⁵⁵ and *The New York Times* top headline likewise announced: “Johnson Pledges to Halt Bombing if Talks Follow.”⁵⁶

The final question confronted by Johnson in the San Antonio address concerned the North’s persistence in their aggression in South Vietnam: “Why...do they insist and persist with the war?”⁵⁷ Johnson answered by describing the reliance of the war effort on public opinion—effectively, the rhetorical nature of the war. North Vietnam persevered, Johnson claimed, due to a “hope that the people of the United States will not see this struggle through to the very end...Are the North Vietnamese right about us? I think not.”⁵⁸ In this way, Johnson appealed to the American people to support America’s effort in Vietnam. He recognized that winning the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 879.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 879.

⁵⁴ Notes of The President’s Wednesday night meeting, Attending the meeting were: Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, Mr. Walt Rostow, Professor Henry Kissinger, Mr. Justice Abe Fortas, General Maxwell Taylor, Mr. Clark Clifford, in the Cabinet Room, October 18, 1967, in Barret, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 500-501.

⁵⁵ “Johnson Puts Up Peace to Hanoi,” *Washington Post*, September 30, 1967, A1.

⁵⁶ “Johnson Pledges to Halt Bombing if Talks Follow,” *New York Times*, September 30, 1967, p.1.

⁵⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address on Vietnam,” *LBJ: PPP*, 1967, Vol. I, 879.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 879.

military struggle in Vietnam depended on winning the public relations struggle. In fact, Johnson concluded the speech with a plea to the American people: “Let the world know that the keepers of peace will endure through every trial—and that *with the full backing of their countrymen, they are going to prevail.*”⁵⁹ Indeed, the very last portion of the speech directly addresses the dissenting “doves”:

The true peace-keepers in the world tonight are not those who urge us to retire from the field in Vietnam—who tell us to try to find the quickest, cheapest exit from that tormented land, no matter what the consequences to us may be. The true peace-keepers are those men who stand out there on the DMZ at this very hour, taking the worst that the enemy can give. The true peace-keepers are the soldiers who are breaking the terrorist’s grip around the villages of Vietnam—the civilians who are bringing medical care and food and education to people who have already suffered a generation of war.⁶⁰

In this passage, Johnson unabashedly confronted the peace movement, rhetorically seizing the initiative. He denied dissenters their peace-defending status, and granted it instead to the soldiers in Vietnam. This actually is an instance of continuity in Johnson’s rhetoric. From the Gulf of Tonkin to the Johns Hopkins speech to the 1966 State of the Union Address, Johnson emphasized the peaceful intentions of America’s intervention in Vietnam. In this address, Johnson became even more aggressive, and further denied the protesters any hope of victory: “We must not mislead the enemy. Let him not think that debate and dissent will produce wavering and withdrawal. For I can assure you that they won’t. Let him not think that protests will produce surrender. Because they won’t.”⁶¹ The only rhetorical instance in which Johnson displayed such an unambiguously antagonistic posture toward the protesters was during the November 17, 1967 press conference.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 880-881. Emphasis added.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 880.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 880.

The Public “Johnson Treatment”

The weeks immediately following the San Antonio contained a flurry of activity. North Vietnam finally rejected the Kissinger diplomatic channel,⁶² a new channel (called “Packers”) developed with Romania as an intermediary,⁶³ and the most dramatic peace demonstration of the Vietnam War took place at the Pentagon. This demonstration, the March on the Pentagon, played an influential part in inducing Johnson to directly address the protest movement in his public rhetoric. And Johnson did so with an authoritative, “take me like I am or forget it” attitude.⁶⁴

Johnson’s approach in his September 29, 1967 speech had been well-received, with General Wheeler calling Johnson’s performance “magnificent... forthright, direct and hard hitting.”⁶⁵ Johnson developed this style during his news conference of November 17, 1967. Rather than plainly standing behind the podium as usual during the entire press conference, over the course of this press conference Johnson stepped out from behind the podium (making use of a portable microphone), took off his glasses, and became markedly animated in his responses. In addition, he answered many of the questions without his notes, and displayed what Johnson’s intimates recognized as his private interpersonal style.⁶⁶ In one-on-one conversations, Johnson’s blunt, partially coercive manner was referred to as the “Johnson treatment.” In this press conference, Johnson stepped out, and got tough with his opponents, giving the public a dose of the “Johnson treatment.”

⁶² Notes of the President’s meeting with the Democratic leadership, October 23, 1967. Cabinet Room in Barrett, ed., *Vietnam Papers*, 511.

⁶³ United States Department of State, “Editorial Note,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume V: Vietnam, 1967*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2002), 1061.

⁶⁴ Memorandum, George Christian to Jim Jones, November 17, 1967, White House Office Press Files, Box 78, “Back-up Material, November 17, 1967 PRESS CONF. #114”, LBJ Library.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, Jim Jones to the President, September 30, 1967, 10:35 a.m., Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library.

⁶⁶ Roy Reed, “A New Presidential Style: That Was ‘the real Johnson,’ His Old Friends Say,” *New York Times*, November 18, 1967, p. 1.

Before any press conference, Johnson received dozens of pages of possible questions and answers from his aides for him to study before appearing at the news conference. In the November 17 news conference, Johnson disregarded many of these recommended answers. One recommendation, however, which Johnson used extremely effectively, came from White House aide Ernest Goldstein: “Mr. President: At this morning’s press conference I hope that you will distinguish between: Peaceful, constructive dissent in the American tradition and Violent, street brawling, storm trooper dissent destructive of the American tradition.”⁶⁷ Johnson offered elaborate answers to questions about dissent concerning Vietnam policy. Early in the press conference, Johnson used Goldstein’s suggested response: “There is a difference between constructive dissent and storm trooper bullying, howling, and taking the law into your own hands.”⁶⁸ Later in the news conference, after he had become more vivacious, he elaborated on this theme when asked about guidelines for dissent, and about the patriotism of the dissenters:

No. I haven’t called anyone unpatriotic. I haven’t said anything that would indicate that. I think the wicked fleeth when no one pursueth, sometimes. I do think that some people are irresponsible, make untrue statements, and ought to be cautious and careful when they are dealing with the problem involving their men at the front. There is a great deal of difference...between criticism, indifference, and responsible dissent—all of which we insist on and all of which we protect—and storm trooper bullying, throwing yourself down in the road, smashing windows, rowdyism, and every time a person attempts to speak to try to drown him out. We believe very strongly in preserving the right to differ in this country, and the right to dissent. If I have done a good job of anything since I have been President, it is to insure that there are plenty of dissenters.⁶⁹

Evidence of references to the March on the Pentagon demonstrators are clear, with the “storm trooper bullying” and “rowdyism,” especially. Johnson, through violent imagery (e.g., “smashing windows”, “storm trooper”) effectively alienates the actively resistant protesting groups from

⁶⁷ Memorandum, Ernest Goldstein to the President, November 17, 1967, 9:00 a.m., White House Press Office Files, Box 78, “Back-up Material NOVEMBER 17, 1967 [removed from notebook]”. LBJ Library.

⁶⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s News Conference of November 17, 1967,” *LBJ: PPP, 1967*, Vol. 1. 1045-1046.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1052.

more “responsible” dissent. The second sentence in the above quote is particularly notable. “The wicked fleeth when no one pursueth,” is a biblical reference to Proverbs 28:1: “The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” The next verse proceeds: “When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order.”⁷⁰ This reference could conceivably have suggested a spinelessness (and certainly a rebelliousness) among the dissenters, and—depending on Johnson’s familiarity with the following verse—a desire by Johnson to better maintain order in the country.

Regarding the aims of the United States in Vietnam, Johnson re-stated the primary justification from the San Antonio speech: “[Our aim in Vietnam] is, namely, to protect the security of the United States. We think the security of the United States is definitely tied in with the security of Southeast Asia.”⁷¹ He also reintroduced the World War II analogy, comparing Communism’s aggression in Southeast Asia to “Hitler moving across the landscape of Europe,” and calling “the concessions that were made by the men carrying umbrellas at that time,” (i.e. Neville Chamberlain), a mistake.⁷²

Johnson also introduced a narrative of dissent in this press conference. Rostow’s draft of the September 29 speech had included material on wartime dissent throughout American history, during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War.⁷³ Although Johnson jettisoned this material for the San Antonio speech, he used some of it during this press conference. However, without notes, he modified Rostow’s narrative, by covering the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 (with a different dissent story than Rostow had provided),

⁷⁰ Proverbs 28:1, 28:2.

⁷¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s News Conference of November 17, 1967,” *LBJ: PPP, 1967*, Vol. 1, 1053.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1053.

⁷³ Draft, September 26, 1967, 8pm, Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 247, September 27, 1967-September 30, 1967, LBJ Library.

the Mexican War, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean War. Johnson used the dissent narrative to support his policies:

Now, when you look back upon it, there are very few people who would think that Wilson, Roosevelt, or Truman were in error. We are going to have this criticism. We are going to have these differences. No one likes war. All people love peace. But you can't have freedom without defending it.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the presence of dissent does not automatically indicate that the President will be viewed favorably in the long term; but Johnson's use of a narrative of dissent demonstrates both active engagement with the protesters' stances, and an animated attempt to justify himself and his policies during this news conference.

Johnson's style during this press conference received widespread acclaim. Harry McPherson told the President: "I thought you made an A today. That was the Johnson people will pay to see--open, full of beans, humorous, determined. It was an appealing performance."⁷⁵ The reporter Marvin Kalb called the White House to say that Johnson "was at his very best today. The woman (or man) who got him away from that podium deserves a kiss on both cheeks or a medal."⁷⁶ The news conference attracted special scrutiny by the press, prompting articles and editorials in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune*—mostly in favor of the new style. In this news conference, Johnson loosened up, became more expressive and candid, and forcefully addressed the protesters and dissidents.

Conclusion

During the fall of 1967, Johnson's rhetoric directly addressed the declining public opinion concerning Vietnam, the rising casualty rate in Vietnam, and the burgeoning, vocal

⁷⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's News Conference of November 17, 1967," *LBJ: PPP, 1967*, Vol. I. 1051.

⁷⁵ Memorandum, Harry McPherson to the President, November 17, 1967, 1:15p.m., White House Office Press Files, Box 78, "Back-up Material, November 17, 1967 PRESS CONF. #114", LBJ Library.

⁷⁶ Memorandum, Mrs. Sammie Bear to White House Press Secretary George Christian, November 17, 1967, White House Office Press Files, Box 78, "Back-up Material, November 17, 1967 PRESS CONF. #114", LBJ Library.

peace movement. It also reflected Johnson's own desires for peace, in discussing the San Antonio Formula diplomatic initiative. In the September 29 speech, Johnson shifted his explanation of America's involvement in Vietnam towards a national security argument, especially emphasizing the domino theory by quoting American and Asian political figures. Johnson's style also became more forceful, beginning with the San Antonio speech and increasing during his November 17, 1967 press conference.

Conclusion

The Johnson administration continued its forceful defense of the war in Vietnam in the fall and winter of 1967, asserting through General Westmoreland and others that the United States was making real progress militarily. Even in the 1968 State of the Union Address, Johnson emphasized America's successes in Vietnam and continued to call for the support of the American people:

Since I reported to you last January:-Three elections have been held in Vietnam-in the midst of war and under the constant threat of violence. -A President, a Vice President, a House and Senate, and village officials have been chosen by popular, contested ballot.- the enemy has been defeated in battle after battle. -The number of South Vietnamese living in areas under Government protection tonight has grown by more than a million since January of last year. These are all marks of progress. Yet: -The enemy continues to pour men and material across frontiers and into battle, despite his continuous heavy losses. -He continues to hope that America's will to persevere can be broken. Well-he is wrong. America will persevere. Our patience and our perseverance will match our power. Aggression will never prevail.¹

These efforts were shattered in the public eye by the Tet Offensive by North Vietnam in late January 1968. Despite the final conclusions of most observers that the United States had fared better militarily than North Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, the heavy casualties and brutal violence, in the public's eyes, invalidated the administration's efforts from September 1967 to January 1968 to make the case for "progress" in Vietnam. The domestic situation continued to deteriorate for Johnson, and on March 31, 1968, he announced that he would neither seek nor accept the Democratic nomination for the 1968 Presidential election.

Limited War Rhetoric and the Domestic Political Context

Throughout this period Johnson's domestic reform programs and the domestic "public opinion" atmosphere decisively affected Johnson's Vietnam rhetoric. Domestic opinion also

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," January 17, 1968, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-1969* (hereafter cited as *PPP: LBJ, 1968-1969*), vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1970), 25.

served as a parameter for Johnson's public policy options, both in Vietnam and domestically. In 1964, this was self-imposed (that is, Johnson was able to maintain satisfactory control over the situation in Vietnam, and kept the military actions "limited and fitting.") In 1965, Johnson attempted to circumvent the domestic limitation by minimizing the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam. In 1966, with the conflict highly visible, Johnson attacked this limitation by unabashedly promoting a policy of "guns *and* butter." In 1967, opposition to the war had become the domestic policy issue, which Johnson attacked directly. At that point, the domestic environment posed the ultimate threat to Johnson's policies in Vietnam: the withdrawal of support for the leader and the institutions responsible for policies. Ultimately, public support shut down altogether, mostly in response to the perceptions of the Tet Offensive.

Part of this breakdown was induced by the original decision not to enflame the passions of patriotism in the people. Unlike in a "total" war (e.g. World War II), Johnson did not call for national mobilization for war. He did not make calls for widespread sacrifices, institute economic controls, or impose censorship on press agencies. In the absence of mobilization for war, Johnson tread the fine line between garnering enough support for the military action in Vietnam, without inciting so much passion as to derail his other political goals (i.e. the Great Society legislation). In Dean Rusk's terms, this was fighting war in "cold blood."²

If measured in terms of passed legislation, Johnson succeeded in maintaining the balance until late 1966. The Democrats lost significant ground in the November 1966 mid-term elections, and 1967 saw a significant slowdown in passage of Johnson's domestic programs. As discussed in chapter 4, public pressures on the administration concerning Vietnam (declining public support for Johnson's Vietnam policies, and a growing protest movement) also increased during

² Dean Rusk Oral History Interview I, July 28, 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

this period. As a result, the ambitious language seen, for example, in the 1966 State of the Union address, receded. Grandiose aims for further domestic reforms, and even plans for U.S.-sponsored international development were effectively shattered. The costs of the war, and the perceptions of stalemate on the ground and a "credibility gap" in the administration, neutralized Johnson's ambitions. In the end, Johnson's Vietnam rhetoric was influenced by domestic policy more than it was influenced by the Vietnam policy itself. From the distraction at the Gulf of Tonkin, to the minimization in 1965, to the high-blown rhetoric of the "guns and butter" speech in 1966, to the appeals to the protesters in 1967, it becomes clear that Johnson's rhetoric of limited war was equally a rhetoric of attempted domestic achievement.

Bibliography

Archival Material

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas:

Oral Histories

William Bundy

Dean Rusk

Personal Papers

William Bundy Papers

White House Central Files

Speech File

White House Confidential File

May 20, 1966

White House Press Office Files

Box 73, 78

Primary Sources

Barrett, David M., ed. *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997.

Beschloss, Michael ed. *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Beschloss, Michael, ed. *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Johnson, Lady Bird. *A White House Diary*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Johnson, Lyndon B. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965.

Johnson, Lyndon B. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, Vol. I. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

Johnson, Lyndon B. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967.

Johnson, Lyndon B. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967*, vol. I. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968.

Johnson, Lyndon B. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-1969*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970.

United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II: Vietnam, 1965*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume V: Vietnam, 1967*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2002.

White House Tapes, Transcripts of Telephone Conversations: White House Series, August 1964.

Internet Resources

The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
<<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ipoll.htm>> (Accessed April 16-17, 2007).

The National Archives and Records Administration, "Statistical Information about Casualties of the Vietnam Conflict: Southeast Asia Combat Area Casualties Current File Record Counts by Year of Death or Declaration of Death."
<<http://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#intro>> (Accessed April 16, 2007).

Newspapers:

The Chicago Tribune
The New York Times
The Washington Post

Secondary Sources

Ball, Moya Ann. *Vietnam-on-the-Potomac*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992.

Bird, Kai. *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms, A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.

Califano, Joseph A. *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. New York: St. Martin's, 1991.

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002.

Schulman, Bruce J. *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.

Small, Melvin. *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press,

1988.

Valenti, Jack. *A Very Human President* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975)

Turner, Kathleen J. *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Woods, Randall B. *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*. New York: Free Press, 2006