



# Nixon, Kissinger, Kerry and the Weathermen: How the American Peace Movement Impacted Foreign Policy During the Vietnam War, 1969-1973

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Nixon, Kissinger, Kerry and the Weathermen: How the American Peace Movement Impacted  
Foreign Policy during the Vietnam War; 1969-1973

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for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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## Abstract

The American peace movement, broken after four years of unsuccessful campaigning against an unrelenting war in Vietnam, fought through Richard Nixon's presidency, determined to put a permanent end to U.S. involvement in the region. Despite their impact of restricting the extremes that often surfaced in Nixon's foreign policy, the president ultimately executed his political strategy in Vietnam to protect his 1972 election bid and ensure his administration's legacy. This resulted in four more years of bloodshed and U.S. deaths in Indochina. Through careful examination of primary sources, including the Nixon tapes, declassified White House documents, memoirs, diaries and books from both the Nixon Administration and peace activists, the evidence provided easily debunked popular history's version of events. Along with strong secondary sources by leading historians in the field, the results are different than what Nixon fought for Americans to believe. The results of the research presented in this thesis do contribute some successes to the American peace movement in their ability to check Nixon's power and limit his often violent and dangerous response to North Vietnam. However, the political savvy of Richard Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger created constant adjustment to their strategy to implement the policy that best suited their political goals, resulting in the continuation of the war throughout Nixon's first term. Eventually, events involving specific peace activists and organizations motivated the president to act in a way that prematurely remove him from office.

## Dedication

Dedicated to Jared, the calm presence throughout days of endless hair-pulling and whose faith in my passion never wavered.

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I would like to acknowledge Professor Erez Manela for his guidance and feedback through months of various drafts and endless revisions

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## Chapter I.

### Introduction

Richard Nixon was the last American president to wrestle with the stalemate of American military involvement in South Vietnam. As he entered the White House in 1968, he was forced to implement his secret plan to end the war in Vietnam that he had mysteriously referred to throughout his campaign leading up to the 1968 election. As Americans anxiously waited to see what their newly elected president would do in Southeast Asia, no one watched the White House closer than the growing group of anti war activists who vocally denounced the morality of American involvement in Southeast Asia. Nixon and the domestic resistance would be projected into constant conflict over the handling of military and economic policy in Vietnam throughout the first four years of Nixon's presidency.

During Nixon's first term, recognizable organizations like the youth-led Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), disintegrated and fractured into radical sections of the peace movement, losing their effectiveness that was ever present during Johnson's stint in the White House.<sup>1</sup> But their split did not diminish the expansion of other peace-oriented groups. Most notably, the Vietnam Veterans against the War, had their most influential years from 1969-1973.<sup>2</sup> The domestic pressure from the peace movement,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 303-305.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew E. Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).



through protests, marches and public activism was felt in the White House during the Nixon Administration. However, Nixon continued military escalation with U.S. forces until after his re-election in 1972. Despite the constant threat of domestic upheaval, Nixon pursued his version of politics to win the war in a way that suited his political ambitions over finishing the conflict and saving American lives in Indochina.

The purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of two foes pitted against each other – the American peace movement and the Nixon Administration – and how the two impacted each other in terms of tangible policy in Vietnam. Perhaps one of the biggest accomplishments, although there were more than just one, of the peace movement was diminishing President Johnson’s hopes of another term; a leader whose foreign policy during wartime was downright immoral to most activists by the end of his first term.<sup>3</sup> But their goal of bringing peace to the region was not accomplished as Nixon moved into the White House. Even more frustrating for early activists, especially SDSers who founded their organization on radical reformation of the U.S. military apparatus<sup>4</sup>, Nixon was a bigger threat than Johnson in his military strategy in the region. Though the strategy and outcomes of the peace movement will be a large focus of this thesis, the crux of answering the question of how Nixon conducted his foreign policy in Vietnam from 1969-1973 is a dedicated focus on his secret, but documented, motives and beliefs surrounding his exit strategy in South Vietnam.

The author has spent a bulk of the research digging through audio, memoirs, memorandums and diaries to fully understand the disguised motives of Richard Nixon

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<sup>3</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1973), 50-51.

and Henry Kissinger. Contemporary historical narratives, as recent as the turn of the twenty-first century, credit honor, dignity and political savvy to how Nixon ended the war in Vietnam; this praise discredited the disgruntled peace movement's achievements during his presidency. The anti war movement pressured Nixon on many issues, from abolishing the draft to motivating Congress to support legislation limiting presidential power<sup>5</sup>; however, as many activists reflect on their accomplishments forty years later, unanalyzed documents revealed completely different motives for Nixon's political plays that gave little credit to the peace movement, especially in the final year of Nixon's first term. This thesis addresses several specific questions:

a) On the heels of Johnson's exit from the White House, how did the peace movement respond to a different president, known for his tough stance on communism but campaigned on platform of de-escalation, in the final year of the 1960s? Was the peace movement able to limit, restrict or stop the Nixon Administration from executing operations, military strategy or foreign policies in Indochina? What successes and failures did the peace movement experience in the first few years under Nixon? What successes and failures did the Nixon Administration experience in the first few years in the White House?

b) How did the Cambodian incursion and the aftermath of the Kent State killings in 1970 impact future foreign policy in Vietnam? How did the birth and rise of the Vietnam Veteran Against the War influence both the peace movement and the Nixon Administration?

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<sup>5</sup> Karin Aguilar-Sanjuan and Frank Joyce, *The People Make the Peace: Lessons from the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Washington DC: Just World Books, 2015).

c) Was their change or evolution from the beginning of the Nixon presidency to the end of his presidency in his abilities to move freely in Vietnam? Did the peace movement remain relevant and a constant pressure throughout the four years of Nixon's first term?

d) How did the final settlement and the tedious process of negotiations conclude the perceived achievements for both the domestic opposition and the White House? Upon the signing of the Peace Accords in January, 1973, what events from 1969-1973 support the overall goal of ending the war for the peace movement or finding an honorable and favorable peace for the Nixon Administration?

The importance of the research presented in this thesis is a firmer understanding of the role that the American peace movement played in the final years of committed U.S. ground troops to Indochina. The Nixon Administration and the anti war movement take dramatically different stances on how the other participated in achieving peace from 1969-1973. The research breaks down the myths and misunderstandings that shape the impact, or lack there of, that the peace movement had during Nixon's reign. It sheds a brighter light, revealing truths that were buried underneath a favorable and popular narrative that Nixon, Kissinger and his administration had perpetuated from the end of the war in Vietnam. Comprehension of how a large peace movement, encompassing students, veterans, and average citizens, could challenge, influence and potentially limit how a president conducted his foreign policies during wartime will create the foundation for further historical study of domestic opposition during future upheaval under other American presidents.

## Chapter II.

### Literature Review

Within contemporary history, much has been written, analyzed and studied on the Vietnam War. Historians have sustained the further deconstruction of certain complexities surrounding the war and its consequences through academic publications, books and documentaries. The image of bell-bottomed, long-haired, draft-dodging counterculture hippies, fighting the man while protesting the war remains popular within the 1960s and 70s narrative. While, on the other end of the spectrum, the Watergate scandal forever immortalized Richard Nixon into American political infamy. These two strong pieces of the Vietnam era plot are well documented – their successes, failures and overall impact on the war in Vietnam. Many books and articles have dissected how the anti war movement navigated among domestic and political obstacles while Richard Nixon, with his elaborate character traits, has been thoroughly researched in an abundance of mainstream and academic publications. However, as the following literature review will detail, the overwhelming amount of documentation focused on one side or the other, hardly honing in on how intertwined their trajectories were. The study of the peace movement is thorough, but lacking any furthering of detailed or focused study on its ultimate success in ending the war during Nixon’s reign. Many authors and historians touch on it, but hardly center their own research around better answering that specific question. Publications that address the anti war agenda are often encompassing the entire history of the movement from start to finish. And even though historians

acknowledge Nixon's clear obsession with the American resistance, the impact of their actions on his foreign policy in Indochina is merely snippets within their research that subsequently support an entirely different theory or hypothesis. The current literature appears to fall into two categories when addressing the peace movement's impact on the Nixon Administration's conduct of foreign policy in South Vietnam: those that focus on Richard Nixon, Kissinger and the politics that came from the White House or those that examine the peace movement, whether focusing on a specific group of activists or not, from its birth in 1965 to its decline in the early to mid 1970s.

One of the more contemporary studies on Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policy while in the White house came from Robert Dallek titled *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*. Dallek's book is expansive, focusing on not only Vietnam but U.S. relations with the Soviets and Nixon's détente with China. But the first third of the book, going in chronological order, depicted how Nixon and Kissinger's relationship influenced decisions made in South Vietnam. Unlike other sources, the literature put heavy emphasis on Nixon's fear of domestic upheaval but neglected the impact the movement had on actual policy made by the administration in Vietnam. Dallek used concrete evidence to persuade the reader that Nixon was fully aware of the consequences of a successful anti war movement, both politically and within his foreign policy, but hardly used that evidence to illustrate how it shaped the administration's foreign policy. Rather, Dallek artfully depicted the destructive characteristics of both Kissinger and Nixon and how their misguided relationship affected the war in Vietnam.

Another study focusing on the two kingpins of U.S. foreign policy, Nixon and Kissinger, is Ken Hughes' *Fatal Politics: The Nixon Tapes, the Vietnam War, and the*

*Casualties of Reelection*; his piece revised the narrative that history had written on Nixon's exit strategy in Vietnam. Hughes introduced the "decent interval strategy"; using the Nixon Tapes as the main support for his argument, the author concluded that despite U.S. public, media and congressional pressure, Nixon and Kissinger ended the Vietnam War with more concern to their reputation and their chances of re-election in 1972. Furthermore, to ensure the illusion of an honorable end to U.S. involvement with an agreement with the North Vietnamese, Kissinger and Nixon sold out the South Vietnamese by promising the communists that the U.S. would not return militarily if they decided to resume their conquest of the South with the stipulation of a decent interval of one or two years before they could safely launch their offensive on Saigon. Other historians, including Jeffrey Kimball with his own two publications, *Nixon's Vietnam War* and *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy*, have also theorized the decent interval strategy as Nixon's true motive in his quest to end the war with the best possible outcome to his political career. These pieces of literature are groundbreaking in their development of Nixon's political maneuvering and alter the bigger picture of what really influenced the president in terms of Asian foreign policy. However, the work took little to no consideration of how daily or monthly decisions by the administration were executed in respects to public dissatisfaction. There is almost no mention of the anti war movement. These are valued studies in their development of overall Nixon strategy despite public pressure but completely ignore the possible significance of the peace movement on day-to-day decisions concerning the Vietnam War leading up to the 1972 election.

A large amount of the literature reviewed for this thesis came from members of Nixon's Administration. Although their books and analysis differ from the authors listed above, as they were participating players in the construction of U.S. foreign policy, they have created literature that add to the body of information surrounding Nixon's policy in Vietnam. Patrick J. Buchanan was Richard Nixon's speechwriter and senior advisor until the end of his presidency in 1974. His 2017 book titled *Nixon's White House Wars: The Battles that made and Broke a President and Divided America Forever* outlined in chronological order the various areas of conflict Nixon faced leading up to the 1972 election, including the Vietnam War. The book focused on both foreign policy and the administrative concerns specific to the radical peace movement. However, Buchanan's several biases created caution for the reader. His unwavering conservatism, personal feelings towards activists and direct involvement with the administration branded certain conclusions unreliable. Perhaps the only useful information is his recollection of Nixon, Kissinger and other advisors involved in Vietnam policy-making are their private feelings towards the peace movement that have gone unpublished or undocumented until now.

Nixon and Kissinger, among others, were the key players in shaping foreign policy throughout the final years of military engagement in South Vietnam. These men wrote several books, autobiographical pieces along with analysis of the war, that revealed motivation from within the White House concerning decisions in Vietnam. Nixon's two books reviewed for this thesis are his autobiography and 1985 reflection on the war titled *No More Vietnams*. As expected, his autobiography addressed all aspect of his presidency, with specific attention to the war in Southeast Asia. But his book *No More Vietnams* went beyond justification of foreign policy decisions and addressed his

perceived impact that the anti war movement had on him, the war and the American society as a whole. Much like Buchanan's piece, Nixon's character flaws and biases shaped much of his conclusions on how negative the peace movement was on the overall war effort. However, he is unable to hid his scathing detest for the young activists which is valuable insight on their relevance during his reign, despite his protests saying otherwise.

Kissinger, much like Nixon, wrote his autobiographical experiences with academic reflections of his involvement in ending the Vietnam War. The two books that have been relevant to this thesis are *The White House Years* and *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in the Extrication from the Vietnam War*. Kissinger's analysis differed from Nixon as they took a more scholarly approach in explaining strategy and foreign policy decisions but ultimately, the conclusion and explanations are the same. However, when Kissinger addressed the domestic turmoil, which he did mention without much thorough detail, he took a more sympathetic understanding of their frustrations. But, just as other officials of the administration claim, Kissinger related little of their impact on the White House. Buchanan, Kissinger and Nixon had their interpretation of how the war was ended, supported by their actual experiences within the government during these events. Fortunately, declassification of documents, memorandums and tapes during Nixon's presidency are excellent fact checkers to hold their explanations up to a higher standard of truth. These books often glorify the intention of what Nixon and his men wanted the public to believe was their honorable attempt at ending U.S. involvement in Indochina. Although deeply flawed in



that respect, they revealed nuggets of truths – motivations, beliefs, insights – on how Nixon and Kissinger constructed their foreign policy in the face of domestic pressure.

The Nixon Administration is not the only focus of research for the following thesis. A large body of literature exists focusing on the anti war movement that grew from the 1965 commitment of U.S. ground troops in Vietnam and remained ever present through the totality of the conflict. TIME produced a multi-volume collection titled *The Vietnam Experience* with each book dedicated to a specific aspect of the war. *A Nation Divided* overviewed two decades of unrest; the build up of the Civil Rights Movement, through the Free Speech Movement and campus protest and the full blown peace movement that challenged the government's policies on U.S. war-making. Unlike other publications that focus on the anti war effort, it overviewed events, various peace groups and their impact without going into in-depth detail. It is a great starting place for a brief history but lacked lessons or conclusions on what significance the movement had on the society it existed within.

Another sweeping peace movement study was produced by historian Tom Wells. His publication, titled *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam*, is an incredible academic analysis on the entire lifespan of the peace movement and the many different activist groups that came and went from the mid 1960s through the mid 1970s. Although SDS is the major group analyzed, other student, minority, class-based and veteran-led anti war groups were included in the study. Wells also highlighted the political events that influenced American activism and how their actions impacted their government, including the Nixon Administration. However, Wells' final conclusion encompassed the entirety of the peace movement and their achievements spanning multiple presidencies

and the different policies implemented over a fifteen-year span. Despite adequate coverage of Nixon's politics during active years of U.S. protest, a full development of how Nixon's strategy was shaped in respect to domestic upheaval is not the main focus of the author's overall research.

Two groups, The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), have caught the attention of historians in their efforts to end U.S. involvement in the war. Not that other female, Latino, black and religious organizations were not active and significant in anti war activity but, SDS and VVAW are popular subjects in historical studies within the U.S. peace movement. Kirkpatrick Sale wrote one of the earliest complete histories of The Students for a Democratic Society titled, fittingly, *SDS*. The book outlined the birth of SDS from its parent organization, LID, to its earliest days of supporting the Civil Rights Movement, the American poor and challenging the Cold War structure the U.S. had catastrophically clung to. The organization eventually accepted a multi-issue stance and began protesting the Vietnam War. Sale included the rapid demise of the post '68, pro-revolution student organization during the Nixon presidency. Despite the front cover's summarization of the overall outcome of SDS' activism, the majority of the book is membership information, internal politics and various chronological events of the SDS. Not that this isn't valuable, but to skim over how successful the organization was during Johnson and Nixon's presidencies is a flaw that diminished the book's potential contribution to a complete understanding of how the peace movement fits into American history.

Several books have been published documenting the historical impact the GI-led resistance had on the establishment and American society post-Tet offensive. Andrew

Hunt's *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* is a thorough insight of not only the events of the organization but, how their activism interlocked with Nixon's presidency and decision-making surrounding the war. It, like Sale's *SDS*, included membership information and internal politics of the organization but also included their massive impact on the governmental apparatus throughout the end of the war. This book filled the gaps missing within in the narrative of the anti war movement. Students took center stage in terms of domestic protest and Hunt's complete history revealed the veterans had a profound significance on the American people and government. However, it is only one piece of a larger movement that Nixon and his men had to combat while navigating foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

Not unlike Nixon and Kissinger, many mainstream activists later recounted their stories of activism in autobiographies decades after the peace movement fizzled out. Two prominent SDSers turned Weatherman, Mark Rudd and Bill Ayers, published memoirs documenting their transition from woke student activists to radical revolutionaries and the lessons they learned from their time spent protesting, demonstrating and eventually, operating underground. Although there are elements of their writings that provided valuable insight on individual and organizational motivation, there is little gathered that support or deny the goal of the following thesis. However, two early SDSers have published several pieces that go beyond autobiographical content. First, Todd Gitlin, early activist and national officer with the SDS, wrote half autobiography and half history of the student-led peace movement titled *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. It is a well researched and written study on the SDS and the organization's total impact, with both successes and failures, on the anti war movement, governmental agencies and U.S.

society as a whole. Gitlin provided a complete history of the rise and fall of SDS but much like Hunt's history of the VVAW, it only focused on one group of activists that made up a larger movement for de-escalation in Indochina.

Tom Hayden, original organizer with the SDS and the main author of the infamous Port Huron Statement, utilized his journalistic skills and produced some mesmerizing reflections, histories and lessons from his experience in the 1960s and early 70s. With too many to name in entirety, there are several publications that came close to answering the question that this thesis strives to answer. His last book written before his death, *Hell No: The Forgotten Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement*, went beyond the SDS and other student-led groups and drew big conclusions on the overall significance of the American resistance during the war and American politics since the impeachment of Richard Nixon. His 2009 publication, *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama*, was similar in theme. Hayden measured the value in a people-led uprising against their government with support from the events of the American peace movement. His continued evaluations of the anti war opposition decades after it had disappeared from mainstream consciousness provided the best framework for what goals and triumphs the entire movement achieved over the ten years it was actively fighting for complete withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam.

### Chapter III.

#### The Birth of the Peace Movement against U.S. Military Escalation in Vietnam

The United States was entangled in Vietnam far before Johnson broke his promise to the American people and committed ground troops to storm the rice paddies of a nation few Americans could identify on a map. As the French colonizers exited the country, unable to suppress the Vietnamese nationalist uprising, the U.S. funneled money and military leadership to prop up a corrupt regime in fear that Ho Chi Minh and his communist rebels would topple another domino in Southeast Asia. But the late 1950s and early 1960s saw little uptick in pro-peace activism. Rather, budding student-led organizations like the Students for the Democratic Society (SDS) countered the Cold War rhetoric that American politicians pushed and supported the Civil Rights Movement with time, energy and limited financial resources.<sup>6</sup> The early 60s were far from tame. Martin Luther King Jr. and black activists conducted marches, sit-ins and civil disobedience; tactics students used on campuses and in street protests in opposition to the war in Vietnam years later. As black Americans challenged America's systematic oppression of its black citizens, the left-leaning youth were awakening to reformed ideas on domestic problems, politics and foreign affairs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 30-111.

<sup>7</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 105-136.

The SDS, which matured out of their parent organization the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), was born in 1960 as a youth movement reassessing American society in the form of race, class, and political alignment.<sup>8</sup> Early activists that grew to legendary fame within the student movement - Tom Hayden, Paul Booth, Paul Potter, Steven Max and Todd Gitlin<sup>9</sup> - were constantly growing and evolving as they struggled to define what SDS would stand for in terms of ideology, politics and contemporary issues both foreign and domestic. Although several activists, most notably Gitlin, interpreted America's conquests in foreign lands with imperialistic motives, including Vietnam, before 1965 SDS was focused on Civil Rights and liberating the poor people of America.<sup>10</sup> But once Johnson found a military reason to dedicate Marines and other U.S. ground troops to a full, fledged land war, SDS began to participate in public displays of protest against the government's policies.<sup>11</sup> SDS was not the only student-led organization to flourish under Johnson's expansion of war. The May 2nd Movement, later to developed into the Progressive Labor Movement (PL) and the W. E. B. DuBois Clubs – not to mention peace advocacies groups like the Student Peace Union – were vocal in their disagreement with U.S. policy in Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> Slowly, the once domestically oriented SDS was becoming the front running student organization, both on and off campus, to engage the

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<sup>8</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 30-34.

<sup>9</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 1-191.

<sup>10</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 177-183.

<sup>12</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 179-181.

American public in conversation specific to American imperialism and war-making in Southeast Asia.

As Johnson's term dragged on, his early decision of fighting the Vietnamese soon plagued his presidency. He demanded more men to go overseas and eventually, instituted the draft that would seal young men's fate before their lives had really even began. From 1965-1968, SDS continued to gain momentum and became the populous face of the youth's anti war movement. Their tactics varied from campus to campus. Nonviolent means were employed by students attempting to educate their fellow classmates on the atrocities enforced by the U.S. military apparatus. Teach-ins, underground newspapers and civil protests were popular alternatives for students, teachers and American citizens who felt nonviolent action was the best way to voice their desistance.<sup>13</sup> Other activists believed more than civil marches and random leafleting needed to be done. Many students were outraged when they learned how their own universities were not only complicit in the conduct of war but often times directly participated in fueling the military machine. This ranged from university funded research for the State Department or chemical companies developing Agent Orange to school boards willingly handing over students scores, subjecting lower scoring students to forfeit their education as a deferment from the war.<sup>14</sup> And as more students, women, minorities and average Americans began to turn towards the cause, many SDSers watched as the carnage continued and the war drug on, despite their best efforts to curb the status quo.

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<sup>13</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 203-220.

<sup>14</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 260-263.

Several activists who reflected on their time spent in SDS all came to the same two conclusions by the end of 1968. First, there were several positive accomplishments the budding peace movement could claim as their own. Johnson, tormented by failure in Vietnam while mounting domestic pressure grew from 1965-1968, decided that he would not seek a second term as president; many old-guard SDS activists, including Gitlin and Hayden, credited the unrelenting resistance of the anti war movement.<sup>15</sup> After three years of a steady increase in military aggression, from larger troop deployments to more bombs dropped on the Vietnamese people, the capitulation of the ultimate liberal war architect and his dangerous accomplices were welcomed with exuberance by many students within SDS.<sup>16</sup> Not only had Johnson decided to step down but he also had halted the bombing of North Vietnam and opened up the possibility of peace talks between the South, North and the U.S. The effort and energy students funneled into the movement had produced actual results in Vietnam from the highest level of government. Despite organizational squabbling<sup>17</sup>, SDS had grown rapidly among American campuses. They had successfully ousted President Johnson while halting the American war machine. However, the second common conclusion found among activists and historians was the desperation felt among the youth and with this desperation came the transformation of a movement from predictable resistance to radical revolution.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Hayden, *Hell No: The Forgotten Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Bill Ayers, *Fugitive Days: Memoirs of an Antiwar Activist* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2001), 119-120.

<sup>17</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 203-240.

<sup>18</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 247-248.



Despite such glowing successes, many activists' euphoria was short lived. Although Johnson was resigning, the war continued and the 1968 election was welcoming in another establishment-friendly politician. That was a daunting deduction. Richard Nixon, a strong contender for president was a corrupt, imperialistic politician whose foreign policy goals in Southeast Asia were unknown. As the election began to heat up, events like the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy heightened a hopelessness that many in the peace movement had already started to feel.<sup>19</sup> No matter how much unrest bubbled into the mainstream, the American system was still fully intact. When one president was knocked down, another one waited in the wings to shift in and continue the carnage in Asia. By 1968 many students active in the peace movement were disenfranchised by electoral politics and concluded the only real means of change was taking direct action in the streets.<sup>20</sup> This was the political climate that Richard Nixon was campaigning in. A movement of resisters, disillusioned by mild civil disobedience, found they must ante up to the violent and severe actions of their government who were willing to silence their voices.

SDS was not immune to this change within the peace movement. The old guard of organizers from Paul Potter to Tom Hayden had outgrown the organization, remaining active but looking for a new clique that accommodated their matured lifestyles.<sup>21</sup> The shift in membership, from the top down, happened before 1968<sup>22</sup> but their momentum in

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<sup>19</sup> Hayden, *The Long Sixties*, 79.

<sup>20</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 458.

<sup>21</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 225-227.

<sup>22</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 253-263.

changing how SDS operated to achieve their goals of a revolution was unstoppable. By Richard Nixon's election in November of 1968, SDS was overwhelmed with grandiose ideas of a revolutionary overthrowing of the U.S. government and bitter sectionalism between radical SDSers and members from the Progressive Labor Movement, which alienated many centralists from the cause.<sup>23</sup> This trend within SDS, of constant insider friction and a constant progression towards violent revolution, did not abate. Richard Nixon won the election and although he ran on a secret platform of ending the war, he was a hawkish conservative who gained fame in the 1950s as Eisenhower's vice president, hell bent on eradicating Communists from every corner of American society, including the government. Nixon varied dramatically from Johnson politically and his electoral victory contributed to an increase in some peace activists' mentality shift from dissidence to aggressive revolt.

The movement was not unjust in their fear of Nixon as the next leader of the United States. Nixon already played a destructive role in Vietnam before Johnson even left office. In attempts to secure his own electoral victory, Nixon encouraged the South Vietnamese to reject peace talks with the North and promised them a better deal if he were to win the White House.<sup>24</sup> His deceit, a fact that remained unknown to activists at the time, revealed his eagerness to continue bloodshed in Southeast Asia to benefit his own political aspirations; a pattern that reemerged abundantly throughout his presidency.

The anti war movement had grown into a national influence regarding the war in a relatively short period of time. The Gulf of Tonkin shook awake many SDSers into a

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<sup>23</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 303.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Dallek, *Partners in Power: Nixon and Kissinger* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 74-77.

semi-attentive acknowledgment that the crushing flaws of the American machine stretched much further than the homeland. Although the initial response was a sole commitment to eradicating domestic oppression among the poor and American minorities, many SDS officials no longer ignored the devastation inflicted on weaker countries as the U.S. government moved steadily towards full financial and military engagement in Vietnam. And as SDS and other groups dedicated their time educating Americans on the depravity committed in Vietnam – a war fought by unwilling young men and perpetrated by elite liberal warmongers – their successes began to mount; adequate draft resistance, growing membership, unclocking university complicity in military development and eventually, ousting the president who was forced to stop the bombing of North Vietnam while exploring the possibility of peace talks. However, desperation and disappointment festered as protesters realized the war would not end with Johnson and by November of 1968, a new, perhaps more unwelcome figure entered the scene, unwilling to capitulate to the North Vietnamese or his domestic critics.

## Chapter IV.

### Nixon's First Year in Office: The October Memorandum, Troop Withdrawals and Glimmers of Cambodia

Richard Nixon spent the better half of his 1968 campaign running on a secret platform of finding peace and ending the conflict in Vietnam. He also ran on a platform, as did his opponents, of containing radical, student-led protest throughout the country.<sup>25</sup> And like Nixon's rivals, he knew the damaging blow the anti war movement could deliver to his political future, mainly his bid at another term in 1972. They had crippled Johnson's chance at re-election and they could certainly do it to him. Their existence in mainstream America – and relevancy in terms of U.S. involvement in Asia – weighed heavily on the president's mind as he began to restructure how his administration would conduct the war.

Throughout January and early February, the president and his men carefully weighed their next moves against the possible backlash of not only the anti-war movement but also support from the general public that were growing tired of a continued American presence in Vietnam.<sup>26</sup> After his inauguration, Nixon and his team spent the first few months deciding how best to proceed with the war; many options

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<sup>25</sup> Hayden, *Hell No*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum of Conversation (Washington DC: January 19, 1969 5:30pm), Telegraph from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State (Saigon: January 24, 1969), Document 2-7.*

loomed as viable possibilities including an all out military victory, supported by the hawkish policy makers in Washington, or the dove stance of immediate unilateral withdrawal of American troops to permanently end the war.<sup>27</sup> Nixon quickly rejected both of these extremes and settled on a hybrid solution; he would maintain military pressure but explore the possibility of negotiations with the North Vietnamese; peace talks proved to be popular among the American public and he would need some type of peace advocacy to maintain any type of military aggression.<sup>28</sup> Already, as early as the first few weeks in office, the president determined that his strategy in Vietnam was dependent on domestic support. He knew negotiations with the communists had polled well and subsequently needed this element within his Vietnam strategy to maintain dropping bombs and marching troops throughout 1969, perhaps longer. And the president did not take long to authorize an increase in militancy in a country he was suppose to be de-escalating in.

As Nixon shifted into his role as Commander in Chief, the North Vietnamese implemented a military offensive that resulted in an insurgency into South Vietnam with rocket attacks on Saigon in February 1969.<sup>29</sup> Nixon had to choose between following his desire to punish North Vietnamese outlets with aggressive bombing with a high possibility of a flare-up from the anti war movement or capitulate to domestic pressure

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 103.

<sup>28</sup> Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 106.

<sup>29</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: February 19, 1969), Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom (Washington, February 25, 1969), Document 22-26.*

and refrain from a retaliatory strike. Nixon's urge to inflict destruction on Cambodian sanctuaries was tough to suppress; the president and Kissinger were fond of Operation Menu, a secret aerial attack later conducted on Eastern Cambodia.<sup>30</sup> The plan evolved out of the February shelling of Saigon but Nixon, in agreement with other aids within the administration, decided to shelf the operation in fear of how it would appear domestically. Nixon's Secretary of State, William Rogers, in March of 1969 advised against the operation to protect themselves from discontent at home:

“At the same time, the negative factors seem to us for the time being to have greater weight. Specifically: US public relations are simply not at the point where we could strike back without a significant agitating effect that might tend to shorten the period of full public support of the whole war effort. At least to this point – and even in the face of the latest action – we may be gaining somewhat by our moderation, in these terms, and we believe that an immediate response would throw large and significant segments of public and congressional opinion into a critical and impatient posture that would make our whole play of hand, both militarily and in Paris, more difficult. On the other hand, if we appear to be going “the last mile”, we would hope to gain additional support in US public opinion for whatever action is eventually deemed to be required.”<sup>31</sup>

Nixon and his advisors did not take the consequences of domestic upheaval lightly. They had just entered the White House and needed to move forward wisely. A quick military response deemed unnecessary by the peace movement could damage both Nixon's ability to end the war on terms that would boost his aspirations of détente with the Soviets and Chinese, not to mention re election in 1972. Kissinger also feared a hasty bombing of

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<sup>30</sup> Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 108.

<sup>31</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam (Washington DC: March 7, 1969), Document 30.*

Cambodia would cripple the beginning of peace talks in Paris.<sup>32</sup> Before the peace movement had time to rally the masses in opposition to Nixon, their legacy provoked thorough evaluation and then prevented further expansion of the war outside of Vietnam.

For all the peace movement was capable of, their threat of overthrowing the American government with anarchy and revolution did not curb Nixon and his men for long. By March of 1969, the administration decided to move forward with Operation Menu with one crucial stipulation: it would remain secret among Nixon, Kissinger and specific men within the administration who were directly involved in crafting Vietnam policy.<sup>33</sup> Nixon demanded secrecy to combat a domestic response and to ensure Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's leader, would be completely unaware; Nixon argued the Cambodian Prince favored the U.S. government and their quest to rid Cambodia of communist sanctuaries but if he knew of military operations beforehand, he would have to publicly denounce American expansion over Cambodian borders.<sup>34</sup> Despite Nixon's verifications for dropping bombs in a neighboring country, he chose to do in secret knowing that his anti war critics on the home front would interpret the operation as winding up the war rather than bringing it to a close. The peace movement was influencing the administration but the results proved negative. In contrast to Johnson, who halted dropping bombs on the North in response to domestic chaos, Nixon did exactly what he intended to do militarily despite the threat of civil upheaval. He found

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<sup>32</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Editorial Note, Document 33.*

<sup>33</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: March 10, 1969), Editorial Note, Document 35-41.*

<sup>34</sup> Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 108.

solutions to his domestic problems, typical of Nixon's political style, by operating in secrecy and later labeling it dangerous to the American mission if he had publicized his moves.

Nixon depending completely on military aggression to end the war was impossible; the American people needed reassurance that Nixon was problem solving outside of pure force if he would continue to receive their support. Melvin Laird, the administration's Defense Secretary, introduced Vietnamization, a substantial piece of Nixon policy that would end U.S. involvement in Vietnam by using American military personnel to educate South Vietnamese fighting forces; these forces would gradually take on full responsibility of combat while U.S. forces gradually withdrew from the conflict. By April of 1969, a strategy had emerged from the Nixon White House on how they would publically attempt to settle an honorable peace with the North and South Vietnamese: continued military pressure and Vietnamization coupled with pacification and ongoing peace talks in Paris. But what appeared to be a concrete attempt at honorably ending the conflict in Vietnam to many average Americans began to be more ammunition for the faltering anti war movement in fighting another deceptive politician whose goal was anything but bringing peace to Indochina.

By the time Nixon settled into the White House and was dropping bombs over Cambodia, the peace movement stalled as they handled inner-organizational feuding, financial hurdles and the undeniable feeling of hopelessness in the face of a new president that many felt a scarier option to his liberal predecessor.<sup>35</sup> For most of the active students who remained enrolled through the spring of 1969, their battle swung

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<sup>35</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 294-295.



back and forth between campus administrators who began seriously cracking down on campus unrest<sup>36</sup> and the government war machine churning up human lives to fuel its imperialist domination of Vietnam. Nixon felt educators at big name schools, such as Columbia, were too soft on campus dissidence; it was the university's duty to punish student revolt, not the federal government.<sup>37</sup> Despite Nixon and university administrator's attempts at suppressing protest, a small percentage of activists continued following the pathway they had embarked on in 1968: violence, property destruction and constant disruption of daily campus activities throughout the country. However, 1969 proved to be a significantly different year for the SDS. By now, the old guard had retreated and new, radical revolutionaries had made SDS their own. The belief that the New Left would bring revolution through guerilla-style street combat had fully imprinted on the leadership of SDS and their new vision started the slow death of the organization in the spring and climaxed in June at their annual National Convention.

The SDS National Convention in June proved too much for the once prosperous student organization. Radicals like Bill Ayers, Jim Jones, Mark Rudd and Bernadine Dohrn initiated a split within the SDS ranks; bitter in-fighting between the PL sanction and future Weather Collective could no longer function within the same organization.<sup>38</sup> The convention was pure chaos as loyalists tore down their competitors<sup>39</sup> until what had been the most successful student-led organization opposing the war was now the tattered

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<sup>36</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 299.

<sup>37</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 299.

<sup>38</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 550-554.

<sup>39</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 550-561.

remains of several groups who went on to have little impact on the peace movement after their departure from SDS. Their demise was an incredible relief for Nixon and his men in the White House. Nixon spent the first few months of his presidency enforcing his “madman theory”; he presented himself as unpredictable and unstable to Hanoi, a man capable of anything, including nuclear war, to win in Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> His theory was discredited when the peace movement grew loud in opposition, therefore, the disbanding of SDS quieted a large section of the anti war crowd that created the most problems for the administration’s foreign policy strategy.<sup>41</sup> With SDS’s collapsed, few other peace organizations rose to fill their void.

By June, Nixon expanded military operations into Cambodia. Briefings between advisors concluded that the administration needed support by a majority of American citizens to progress with aerial and ground operations conducted throughout Indochina. With SDS out of the picture, the president had breathing room to make bolder strikes in Southeast Asia. The strength of the youth movement depleted after June and this was an incredible break to alleviate the domestic pressure that hindered military freedom. Through the spring, Nixon was convinced the North Vietnamese rejection of American negotiating points stemmed from a prosperous American anti war movement.<sup>42</sup> If Hanoi held on against American aggression, the growing upheaval in the states would capitulate U.S. strategy. Even as SDS was imploding in New York, Nixon and top officials

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<sup>40</sup> Dallek, *Partners in Power*, 93.

<sup>41</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 306-307.

<sup>42</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 308.

discussed at Midway how “The U.S. domestic situation is a weapon in this war.”<sup>43</sup>

Considering the various angles Nixon explored to force the North Vietnamese into a vulnerable bargaining position, the downward spiral that plagued the peace movement only bolstered Nixon’s confidence to move freely without little domestic backlash. To add another crushing blow to the peace movement, as SDS was splitting apart, Nixon traveled to Midway to announce a development in his foreign policy plan, in cooperation with President Thieu, that appeared to move in a direction of de-escalation.

On June 8, 1969, in Midway, President Nixon announced the U.S. would begin gradual withdrawals of American combat forces within the year. This announcement served several purposes: first, it provided support to the claim that the Nixon Administration was winding down the war, silencing moderate critics within the media, Congress and the peace movement.<sup>44</sup> Kissinger wrote to Nixon two weeks after the announcement: “Those Americans who have been most vocal against the war probably would not be silenced by this action, but important elements of the US public would be encouraged.”<sup>45</sup> Radical Weathermen remained unmoved by the withdrawals but moderate

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<sup>43</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: June 11, 1969), Document 83.*

<sup>44</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: June 23, 1969), Document 87.*

<sup>45</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: June 23, 1969), Document 87.*

Americans questioning the morality of the war believed the government was fulfilling their promise of disengagement. Their realities of Nixon's conduct in Vietnam excluded escalation in Cambodia, as Operation Breakfast was still unknown to the average American. Although, William Beecher published leaked information about Operation Breakfast on May 2, 1969 in the *New York Times* to almost no commentary from Congress, the media or the anti war movement.<sup>46</sup> Second, Nixon's announcement was political maneuvering to create some progress with Hanoi in negotiations. From the beginning, conversations on mutual, unilateral withdrawals from South Vietnam were the important point the U.S. emphasized to Hanoi in Paris; Lodge and Kissinger neglected addressing political problems and focused on a settlement where both invaders leave South Vietnam.<sup>47</sup> Nixon was following through on his word, resulting, at least to Kissinger, in the North Vietnamese adjusting their firm demands days after Midway; no longer did they insist U.S. negotiations would include the NLF.<sup>48</sup> Lastly, Nixon boasted that Vietnamization was working. The truth in this statement, however, was unsupported. By late June, U.S. defense and intelligence departments confirmed the South Vietnamese

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<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 81.

<sup>47</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970*, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: March 10, 1969), Talking Points for President Nixon (Washington DC: March 31, 1969), Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: April 3, 1969), Document 35, 50, 52.

<sup>48</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970*, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: June 11, 1969), Document 83.

military units were currently ill equipped and “as the combat role of the RVNAF increases, the manpower problems are likely to worsen rather than improve.”<sup>49</sup> Despite Nixon’s manipulation of information, this was his version of the truth that the American people were sold. Now the peace movement faced a challenge to expose a factual truth and continue their quest to end the war in Vietnam.

Throughout the year of 1969, the peace movement and the Nixon Administration experienced direct confrontation unknown to the average American. Fulfilling a campaign promise of eliminating disruptive and dangerous campus protesters, Nixon continued and increased surveillance and infiltration of what he believed to be communist-backed organizations disguised as American peace groups.<sup>50</sup> Months before the SDS split, Nixon significantly ramped up surveillance through FBI agents masquerading as radical activists on college campuses and community planning meetings.<sup>51</sup> However, their undercover missions were often easily detected by students who felt their extreme radicalism upon joining SDS was a dead giveaway to their true allegiance; youth leaders like Mark Rudd eventually were able to differentiate easily between true converts and FBI imposters.<sup>52</sup> Despite the large influx of FBI agents hanging around student-led peace organizations, they reported back to the Nixon

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<sup>49</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6I, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President’s Assistant National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: June 25, 1969), Document 89.*

<sup>50</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 314.

<sup>51</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 311.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Rudd, *My Life with SDS and the Weathermen Underground* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 137.

Administration that there was no evidence that financial backing for SDS, or any other peace group, was coming from North Vietnam, China, or Russia.<sup>53</sup> This was not the answer Nixon was looking for. He needed FBI intelligence corroborating his theory that communist puppet masters controlled the New Left which, used correctly, could further discredit the peace movement. Reliance on FBI agents to gather information and disrupt progress among peace activists never subsided after the fall of SDS. In fact, he used the FBI and CIA years later when another group, the Vietnam Veterans against the War, grew influential. His obsession with secretive maneuvering, pertaining to Vietnam, including wiretapping, infiltration, and eventually illegal break-ins proved to be the final straw in how far the president could lie and manipulate to satisfy his own selfish needs.

The Fall of 1969 was important for both the peace movement and the Nixon Administration. Despite the catastrophic demise of the SDS, other activists working within smaller organizations continued to challenge the White House policies through standard methods of resistance. The year had provided challenges that kept the movement constantly shifting but those who remained loyal to the cause worked towards the climax of the year: The October and November Moratoriums. By the summer, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE), CAPAC and SWP were split on whether to focus their attention on the march in Washington or gather support for the Chicago eight<sup>54</sup>; a group of veteran protesters, including popular figures like Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, and Rennie Davis, who were facing criminal charges because of the violence that erupted during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in

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<sup>53</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 541-545.

<sup>54</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 331-333.

Chicago.<sup>55</sup> Eventually, under the leadership of the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, endorsement went to the fall Moratoriums in Washington.<sup>56</sup> The Moratorium was the first major test of a different peace movement in the wake of SDS's split and the emergence of the Weathermen. The year had proven difficult for the activists protesting the war and Nixon, a president who promised peace, was increasing military aggression with no end in sight.

For many moderate activists, the Nixon Administration was not the only concern. The Weathermen, a radical faction diverging from the smolders of the SDS, quickly advanced down a pathway of profound violence that frightened the general American public. Their philosophy was no longer challenging American imperialism through a reformist organization but completely overhauling the status quo with dramatic revolution. With regard to Vietnam, it was no longer acceptable to only demand disengagement but rather, bring the war home through guerilla-style violence in the streets.<sup>57</sup> It was an unusual approach to shatter U.S. imperialism and end the war in Vietnam. Their progression from reform to revolution made sense in context of the political events leading up to 1969. Four years of constant organizing and protesting provided some tangible results but ultimately, politicians conducted the war without consequence or a realistic timetable for completion. Passionate youths grew exhausted, disenchanted and hopeless. As activists gained ground, the powerful elite within the government sidestepped their progress to keep the war going. The radical's justification,

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<sup>55</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 593.

<sup>56</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 333-334.

<sup>57</sup> Rudd, *My Life with the SDS*, 154-170.

however shocking and unreasonable it appeared to the silent majority, concluded that their violent actions were a noble cause that trumped the government's treachery in Indochina. However, the Weathermen's reasoning had several negative outcomes that eventually crippled their cause and significantly maimed the overall achievements the anti war movement had spent four years working towards.

First, their radicalism further alienated the peace movement as a whole from the public they were attempting to persuade. Building bombs and vandalizing local businesses did not change the minds of troubled Americans. Many average joes were not enthusiastically lauding the war but they certainly were not applauding domestic terrorism perpetrated by their own people. The Weathermen were born from the SDS, the popular face of the peace movement; therefore, the majority of Americans were unable to distinguish the line between radical fanatic and average activist. Radicalism, encouraged by the Weathermen, hurt the overall cause. Second, the Weathermen alienated the North Vietnamese from the U.S. domestic opposition, especially after their Chicago "Days of Rage."<sup>58</sup> Many high profile activists, including Hayden, Rudd and Dohrn, sympathized with the North Vietnamese and felt their alliance with the movement would help put an end to the war.<sup>59</sup> An alliance between the North Vietnamese and anti war movement was not one sided. A common belief, one strongly supported by the Nixon Administration, was the North Vietnamese were stalling in negotiations with the United States to outlast a domestically challenged U.S. presence in South Vietnam; with incredible pressure from the peace movement and a general public growing weary of the conflict, the American

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<sup>58</sup> Rudd, *My Life with the SDS*, 215-216.

<sup>59</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 248.



governing body, mainly Congress, would eventually eliminate funding for the war and immediately force Nixon to leave Vietnam without his version of victory.<sup>60</sup> The unpredictable actions of the Weathermen spooked the DRV (North Vietnam) who relied on a restless American home front applying constant pressure on Congress and the White House. If the Weathermen alienated their own people from their cause, they were in turn damaging the strategy the North depended on to outlast U.S. military presence and win re-unification of the Vietnamese people.

However, the violent radicalism of the Weathermen did provide a positive for the movement in cutting down the productivity of the Nixon Administration. If their sporadic violence strengthened Nixon's hand in negotiations with the North Vietnamese, it continued to disrupt the domestic home front, pushing more Americans to feel the country was destined to rip apart completely.<sup>61</sup> As the country appeared to be going down in flames, the basic connection between societal destruction and the possibility of domestic peace was ending the war in Vietnam. Out of basic fear and desperation, the violent actions of few, appearing all over the country could end if more Americans voiced a preference for immediate withdrawal of ground troops. The non-doves of the American public did not have to agree with the peace movement's objectives but their desire to cease domestic unrest resulted in their cries for ending the war. With less public

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<sup>60</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State (Saigon: January 24, 1969), Letter from the Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam (Lodge) to President Nixon (Paris: February 12, 1969), Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: March 6, 1969), Document 7, 20, 29.*

<sup>61</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 298-303.

support Nixon's political standing was shaky, threatening his future in politics along with his ability to manage the war on his terms.<sup>62</sup> Nixon needed quiet, obedient loyalty from all corners of the American public to continue his ramp up of various aerial and ground operations throughout Indochina. The Weathermen, despite their alienating philosophy, broke the silence of many Americans who up until 1969 had unwaveringly backed their government's goals in Vietnam.

The formal peace movement, still committed to civil disobedience but publicly denounced the Weathermen's strategy of violent chaos, geared up for several national marches through October and November. The Nixon Administration denied publically, before and after, any real impact the Moratoriums had on policy-making through the fall of 1969,<sup>63</sup> however, private and declassified correspondence verify a large concern the fall demonstrations would have within the United States and Vietnam. In September, attempting to deflate any credibility the march may have, Nixon voiced little concern about American emotion in regards to Vietnam; the comments provoked a huge media response and created more exposure for the Moratoriums.<sup>64</sup> Despite his aloof demeanor towards the demonstrations and their impact on his political future, the fall of 1969 was a fragile time for progress in Nixon's attempts at ending the war. He had spent almost a year in office making little leeway towards an honorable settlement with the Vietnamese. An American hope of a new president finally disengaging militarily in Asia was a fleeting reality. Negotiations had stalled in Paris, American soldiers continued to die

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<sup>62</sup> Dallek, *Partners in Power*, 117-118.

<sup>63</sup> Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 10-23.

<sup>64</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 352-353.

despite gradual withdrawals and aerial bombardment had spanned across country borders into Cambodia. Early predictions by government officials warning Nixon public opinion would wain by the end of the year if direct action towards ending the war was not taken<sup>65</sup> was proving accurate as momentum for the Moratoriums grew. In tandem with reality that the conflict was becoming “Nixon’s War,” the November 1st deadline aimed at the North Vietnamese bringing realistic concessions to the negotiating table before provoking U.S. military might had come and gone without the administration following through on their threat.<sup>66</sup> However, Kissinger and Nixon seriously considered retaliatory action when the North Vietnamese ignored their ultimatum.

As early as September, Kissinger and Nixon began crafting Operation DUCK HOOK; its purpose was:

“designed to achieve maximum political, military, and psychological shock, while reducing North Vietnam’s over-all war-making and economic capacity to the extent feasible’ within a relatively short period of time. The campaign was to be conducted not as a continuous military action but ‘in a series of separate and distinct actions, each signaling an increasing or escalating level of military intensity.’”<sup>67</sup>

As the November 1st deadline approached, Nixon and Kissinger continued to develop their plan of aggression to force a response from Hanoi in case the North Vietnamese called Nixon’s November deadline as a bluff.<sup>68</sup> However, the administration never pulled the trigger. Declassified documents and journal entries confirmed the anti war

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<sup>65</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 12-13.

<sup>66</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 99-104.

<sup>67</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 100.

<sup>68</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 100-101.

demonstrations and growing opposition domestically, deeply impacted Nixon's move away from following through with Operation DUCK HOOK. A private telephone conversation between Kissinger and Nixon revealed the president's indecisiveness on when to deliver the blow; Nixon feared doing it after October 15th, the date of the first Moratorium, because "he doesn't want to appear to be making the tough move after the 15th just because of the rioting at home."<sup>69</sup> But, as Kissinger deduced, doing it before the 15th might disrupt the slight chance that "Hanoi might want to move," and "if we hit them before they have a chance to make the move, it will look as if we tricked them."<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, Nixon canceled DUCK HOOK and instead, initiated a secret global nuclear alert through the last few weeks of October; an action that years later, Secretary Laird confirmed had almost no effect on the Soviets or the North Vietnamese.<sup>71</sup>

The demonstrations eventually came to Washington, and to many government officials' surprise, the marchers were generally peaceful, calm and respectful; they marched in solidarity with black armbands, read the names of the dead and asked for a lasting peace with the return of U.S. fighting units from Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> However, some administration staff, including speech writer Pat Buchanan, felt the outliers – protesters

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<sup>69</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Notes of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: September 27, 1969 4:40pm), Document 126.*

<sup>70</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Notes of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: September 27, 1969 4:40pm), Document 126.*

<sup>71</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 110-116.

<sup>72</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 371-373.

who smashed windows and created chaos – were the center of America’s attention and repulsed the public to a point of complete exhaustion with their cause.<sup>73</sup> Despite the few who relied on violence, many activists felt the fall Moratoriums were a success; as did the administration who appeared rattled by the growing momentum of the movement’s ability to persuade average American’s to their cause.<sup>74</sup> Privately, senior officials acknowledged the sentiment that the war needed to reach an end immediately spread beyond the campuses. Nixon’s Chief of Staff, Bob Haldeman, knew the demonstrations created problems for the administration and the anti war movement “momentum is tremendous and broad based.”<sup>75</sup> As Nixon attempted to publicly portray that the protesters had little impact on his plans in Vietnam, privately he acknowledged and accepted the demonstrations were well-received on the home front.

On November 3rd, 1969, Nixon appeared on television screens across the nation to reassure the American people that he had a trustworthy plan for getting out of Vietnam. The speech that history dubbed “The silent majority speech” called on average citizens, “the great silent majority of my fellow Americans”<sup>76</sup> to remain loyal to the president and his plan; that through his desire to achieve an honorable peace he would readjust American policy that differed from his predecessor for the best possible results,

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick Buchanan, *Nixon’s White House Years*, 62-68.

<sup>74</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 375-376.

<sup>75</sup> H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: Berkley Books, 1995), 120.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Nixon, “November 3, 1969: Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam” in University of Virginia, Miller Center, Presidential Speeches. Richard Nixon Presidency. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/november-3-1969-address-nation-war-vietnam>.

benefiting all Americans and Vietnamese alike. However, his speech was the defensive response of an administration under pressure from the massive fall demonstrations. He countered the ugly images of protesters he has perpetuated by sympathizing with their convictions:

“I share your concern for peace. I want peace as much as you do. There are powerful reasons I want to end this war. This week I will have to sign 83 letters to mothers, fathers, wives, and loved ones of men who have given their lives for America in Vietnam. It is very little satisfaction to me that this is only one-third as many letters as I signed the first week in office. There is nothing I want more than to see the day come when I do not have to write any of those letters... I have chosen a place for peace. I believe it will succeed.”<sup>77</sup>

However, these few lines, appearing to connect Nixon’s goals with those of the peace movement were strategic in their possible impact on the many Americans who teetered between supporting the president and questioning the purpose of more time spent in conflict. These lines also sought to discredit the regular rhetoric coming from the peace movement; that Johnson, and now Nixon, were tyrants who were hell bent on waging war in Vietnam to benefit American interest. Although Nixon confirmed he wanted peace and a final conclusion to the war, his actions and private conversations confirmed that securing a second term as president in 1972 motivated his policy decisions far more than finding immediate peace in Indochina. Regardless, the speech was hailed a success with the White House mailroom exploding immediately with over 50,000 telegrams and 30,000 letters largely in support of the president.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam.”

<sup>78</sup> *Richard Nixon Foundation*: “President Richard Nixon’s 14 Addresses to the Nation on Vietnam” (September 2, 2017).

The date of the demonstrations coinciding with Nixon's deadline to Hanoi, along with their growing publicity, shaped Nixon's foreign policy decisions in Vietnam. Memorandums between Kissinger and Nixon verify their desire to act militarily in Vietnam,<sup>79</sup> but the mounting domestic pressure successfully changed the president's course of action. Despite his public stance denying any real impact the peace movement had on his foreign strategy, Nixon made moves to counteract any progression the peace movement achieved in the fall of 1969. He knew their viewpoint was gaining momentum among regular Americans whose patience with the war in Vietnam had expired. Various missteps politically and militarily in Vietnam could result in an abrupt end for his bid on a second term in 1972. This mindset curbed Nixon and Kissinger's decision to pound North Vietnam militarily with Operation DUCK HOOK. The demonstrations forced the administration to react with a speech requesting loyalty to the president who was desperately looking for peace in Vietnam. Nixon publically played the illusion that the peace movement left no impression on the administration; just a bunch of reckless, treasonous hippies destroying the government's chance to successfully settle the war.

As the first year of Nixon's presidency came to a close, the war in Vietnam continued to consume American life at home. For a president who campaigned on a secret plan to secure peace and bring American boys home, 1969 for many, looked the same as the four year that came before it: the war raged on, American soldiers came back in body bags and the peace that so many hoped for seemed distant and unattainable.

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<sup>79</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: October, 1969), Memorandum of Conversation (Washington DC: October 7, 1969, 10:51am-12:04pm), Document 129-133.*

Although, 1969 differed from the previous years that Johnson reigned over. Nixon introduced troop withdrawals and a new policy to pass the responsibility of South Vietnam's future onto the South Vietnamese. However, the ultimate goal of the peace movement to finally end U.S. involvement in Vietnam was far from accomplished. To the activists fighting the U.S. governmental apparatus, the small concessions Nixon made to wind down the war were not enough. As they relished in their victory of their October and November marches, they prepared for another year of resistance with the possibility that the war would continue despite their efforts. The leadership of the anti war movement carved out time to evaluate their actions, both publicly and within the organization, to continue towards progress on achieving their goals. Nixon, who spent most of the year maneuvering around public opinion and bracing for maximum damage from public resistance reflected on his successes and failures with the best method to conclude the war with respects to the home front.

The year of 1969 had elements of success for the peace movement that greatly influenced foreign policy within the year. Two major operations of military aggression that Nixon and Kissinger felt necessary for progress in Vietnam were ultimately canceled as a result of possible backlash from domestic opposition. Nixon was unable to respond with force to the North Vietnamese offensive in February because he needed public opinion to mostly remain on his side during his presidency. He could not follow through on his November ultimatum with Operation DUCK HOOK because of the high publicity surrounding the two demonstrations in October and November. Declassified documents, along with first-hand accounts from administration staff, verified the victory the peace movement scored by dwarfing Nixon and Kissinger's ability to execute military



operations throughout Vietnam. The first year of Nixon's presidency was the most difficult for him to navigate. He was up against a jaded population, tired of living in a nation at war and experiencing extreme, violent domestic upheaval. Nixon inherited a war that destroyed his predecessors politically and a vocal New Left only created more problems for the White House. He was figuring out how to proceed with the war, while combating the North Vietnamese on the battlefield and in secret negotiations all while convincing Americans to remain by his side while he implemented new foreign policy.

However, as much as Nixon was unable to execute specific operations on demand throughout the year of 1969, he also experienced successes that curbed the progress of the peace movement. He did not achieve a settlement out of desperation. He continued to use military advancements to support his negotiating standpoint in Paris. As the Weathermen morphed out of a dead SDS, scaring Americans away from their cause, Nixon sold his strategy of Vietnamization by pulling minimal forces out of Vietnam. For many Americans, they saw their own children, husbands and siblings come home because of the president; proof that he was maintaining his word of de-escalation. He unleashed an aerial attack of bombs along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Cambodia – a move Nixon and Kissinger felt crucial but would certainly result in a severe domestic outcry – all while keeping it secret from the general public. Even when news broke of his breach in neutrality the government had almost no backlash from the movement. His speech on November 3rd countered the protesters throughout the nation by reassuring the silent majority that he had a plan for honorable peace in Indochina, which resulted in a steady uptick of positive, public support.

The peace movement gained celebratory victories over the administration. But their ultimate goal of ending American imperialism and U.S. aggression in Southeast Asia fell short. They influenced monthly decisions that stopped violent operations from completion but Nixon remained deeply involved in Vietnam to the benefit of his political aspirations. As the next few years of his presidency illustrated, Nixon and Kissinger's foreign strategy in Vietnam developed to secure the election of 1972. Although 1970 through 1972 revealed a stronger president, able to manipulate the American people's opinion on foreign policy to benefit himself, 1969 was a fantastic precursor to the manipulative game Nixon was able to play. Specifically, with the aerial expansion over Cambodia and the the contemplation of DUCK HOOK, the impact of the peace movement on Nixon's foreign policy was superficial. He needed their cooperation to maintain his foreign policy but if he was able to bypass their reaction to advance his own goals, whether with secrecy or fabrication of the facts, he would choose that avenue of deceit every time. For Nixon, 1969 was a year of exploration and education. He was able to test the American public on how best to guide the course in Vietnam without creating chaos but pushing forward his own agenda. The mistakes Nixon acknowledged in retrospect throughout 1969, especially backing away from DUCK HOOK, were not repeated in the future. However, as much as Nixon improved his political abilities in regards to the home front, the peace movement remained consistent and prepared to take on a long, tedious task. As America lurched into the 1970s, a new group of Americans, fresh from their combat days in Vietnam, challenged the administration at a level only the SDS had accomplished before their demise. The year 1970 would shock every American

to their core and revive a movement that needed an act of insanity and brutality to refocus its mission of ending military involvement in Indochina.

## Chapter V.

### Cambodia, Kent State and the National Appearance of the Vietnam Veterans against the War

Richard Nixon prepared for his second year in office with some of the U.S. populace still fighting his political decisions in Vietnam and the war continued to claim American lives with limited success both on the battlefield and through negotiations with the North Vietnamese. The year of 1970 experienced progress on the negotiating front. Henry Kissinger embarked on several secret meetings in Paris with representatives from Hanoi attempting to settle the war by accomplishing a favorable position for the United States. The U.S. government kept their promise of gradual withdrawals of ground troops throughout the year but decreasing military aggression remained absent from their foreign policy strategy in Indochina. The spring of 1970 blew the lid off an already fragile American society deeply disturbed by a continued U.S. presence with Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia. As a result, American college campuses erupted into violent protest resulting in the death of multiple students at both Kent State and Jackson State. The anti war movement experienced a revival as more Americans moved to denounce Nixon's invasion of Cambodia. And while the Weathermen and various peace advocates who obtained visibility during the earlier war years continued their resistance, often radical and violent, a new group of dissidents emerged. Vietnam veterans, the very men who felt they were pawns in their government's war, found a place within the anti war movement. Their organization, the Vietnam Veterans against the War (VVAW), began breaking barriers that other activists were limited to because of their reputation,

disgruntled status within society or their lack of physical sacrifice in Vietnam. Although they dabbled in known actions of resistance, like street theater, their protest evoked reactions from sheltered American who remained ignorant to specific aspects of the war. Both camps, the Nixon Administration and the peace movement, faced new struggles to overpower the other. Just as the year before, the two groups remained intertwined and dependent on one another's strategy. New developments within the war and the home front rattled an already fragile country, unprepared for the escalation both groups were willing to welcome to accomplish their objectives.

The winter of 1970 was a cold period of time for the Nixon Administration. The peace movement executed wildly successful demonstrations in the fall of 1969 that reverberated within the White House well into the new year. Despite Nixon's own success with his "Silent Majority" speech, he fixated on how he could rally his own supporters while undercutting the peace demonstrators.<sup>80</sup> One approach, unknown to the public, was Nixon and Kissinger's networking to organize secret talks with representatives of high official standings in Hanoi. Day one of the new year, January 1st 1970, a memo written by Kissinger to Army Officer Vernon Walters expressed his desire to secure secret talks with Xuan Thuy, a high ranking official from Hanoi's Politburo.<sup>81</sup> Negotiations and the possibility of a settlement with North Vietnam was important to both men, but perhaps, more to Kissinger who valued his abilities to negotiate and seriously doubted a positive outcome with Vietnamization. In mid January, Kissinger

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<sup>80</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 144-151.

<sup>81</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from The President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Senior Defense Attaché in France (Walters) (Washington DC: January 1, 1970), Document 166.*

warned the president that he doubted positive feedback on Vietnamization, as he saw no solid evidence the ARVN was improving; his argument that the time of year was ripe for a North Vietnamese offensive that could dismantle any progress the ARVN had made within the year that Vietnamization had been rolled out.<sup>82</sup> These early months defined Kissinger and Nixon's belief that if the U.S. was unable to achieve a settlement with the North Vietnamese to favorably end the war, they would have to invest completely in the Vietnamization program. As January revealed Kissinger's doubts about the failing U.S. initiative in South Vietnam, he began his outreach in establishing an open channel of communication between Thuy and himself, with hopes of finding success through negotiations and not in Vietnamization.

Kissinger made contact with Hanoi as the two countries agreed to meet privately in Paris in February, March and April. On February 21st, Kissinger met with Lu Duc Tho in Paris for the first round of private talks where the National Security Advisor emphasized two critical points: despite public protests, a large majority of Americans supported the president and his policy and "we prefer negotiations to Vietnamization and would choose the latter only if it were obvious that negotiations would not succeed."<sup>83</sup> The overall conversation proved positive as both sides agreed to future meetings that

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<sup>82</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: January 19, 1970), Document 170.*

<sup>83</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum of Conversation (Paris: February 21, 1970, 9:40am), Document 189.*

occurred in March and April.<sup>84</sup> Nixon was impressed with negotiations between Tho and Kissinger, he presumed a settlement benefiting the U.S. that would end the fighting in Indochina would materialize by the end of 1970.<sup>85</sup> Nixon clung to this theory years later within his memoir but credited his military move into Cambodia decisively derailed the weakening of the United State's position by not accepting a compromise while negotiating with North Vietnam.<sup>86</sup> However, as official documents of all three private talks reveled, positive contact denied tangible results. Kissinger and Nixon refused to discuss political problems, as they concluded the Vietnamese should work that out among themselves. They offered a timetable for U.S. withdrawals but only if the North Vietnamese agreed to remove their troops from the South as well.<sup>87</sup> Hanoi held firm, refusing a North Vietnamese withdrawal from the South and both sides left Paris by March no closer to a settlement. Nixon and Kissinger still shared, privately, doubts about the success of Vietnamization through the first half of the year,<sup>88</sup> despite their public

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<sup>84</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: undated), Document 191.*

<sup>85</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 166.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 446.

<sup>87</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: undated), Document 200.*

<sup>88</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: March 2, 1970), Document 195.*

proclamation of the program's successes, which forced them into two camps: find compromise through an agreed upon settlement with the DRV or increase military might until Hanoi broke permanently. But as 1969 proved to Nixon and his colleagues, public criticism and the anti war movement would go to great lengths to punish the president if he decided upon military aggression by jeopardizing his career in the future.

While the Nixon Administration focused on private negotiations with the DRV, the peace movement gave Washington little trouble as their momentum was at its lowest in the wake of the autumn moratoriums.<sup>89</sup> For many students and activists who participated in the 1969 demonstrations, they experienced a complete stalemate with the U.S. government. Nixon countered with his speech on November 3rd that proved popular among average Americans who felt ambivalent towards the Vietnam War and even though some troops returned home, many more people, both American and Vietnamese, were losing their lives daily. For the movement participants that remained above ground with their resistance, the common form of street-style demonstrations and protests no longer felt effective or impactful on the men in Washington.<sup>90</sup>

The spring of 1970 also proved defeating for the peace movement in other ways than a lack of success on the home front. A shortage of funding, a persistent problem that plagued most peace organizations, closed the Moratorium headquarters in April and those activists attempting change outside of a structured organization continued to experience bellicose surveillance from the FBI and CIA.<sup>91</sup> As the Weather Bureau ramped up

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<sup>89</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 403.

<sup>90</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 405-406.

<sup>91</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 408-414.



targeted bombings throughout the winter and spring of 1970, high ranking government officials, including the president himself, feared extreme measures, such as kidnapping or even attempted assassinations against administration members could become commonplace.<sup>92</sup> It was convenient for the president to lump all activists into the same category of radical murderers and justify an increase in surveillance. However, for the Weathermen operating underground, a pivotal event forever changed their course in how they conducted their protest. On March 6, 1970, three known radicals affiliated with the Weather Bureau, accidentally died in a massive explosion within a New York townhouse while constructing a bomb meant for government accomplices on a nearby military base.<sup>93</sup> The explosion rattled survivors within the organization and as they collected themselves from around the country, they decided that future bombings would not injure or kill any American civilians; they warned people in the bomb's path before the planned explosion and spared lives while wreaking havoc on governmental infrastructure.<sup>94</sup> Despite their epiphany, their softening of violent radicalism denied peace of mind to the Nixon Administration. In fact, Nixon spent the spring of 1970 plotting how to neutralize any activist within the movement that jeopardized his negotiating and foreign policy stance with Vietnam.

Far before Nixon stepped foot in the White House, anti war participants had been the subject of government surveillance, often extralegal. Nixon claimed that his move into the White House eliminated the use of black bag jobs, covert mail opening, campus

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<sup>92</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 166.

<sup>93</sup> Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 191-193.

<sup>94</sup> Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 213-216.

informants and electronic surveillance to track particularly worrisome protesters; however, he changed his mind by 1970 after meeting with a young lawyer named Tom Huston who recommended returning to these tactics to protect Americans both outside and within the government.<sup>95</sup> Nixon endorsed the implementation of what came to be the Huston plan, but AG Mitchell and head of FBI Hoover disapproved of reintroducing these tactics, leading Nixon, who had approved the plan originally to withdraw his support.<sup>96</sup> However, despite the president's withdrawal of support, the plan was put into place, and used by the intelligence community in Washington.<sup>97</sup> Many activists experienced brutal, threatening and destructive surveillance throughout the course of Nixon's years as president including break-ins, the destruction of the organization's property and agents often tailing activists as they moved from one location to the next. This was Nixon's official story per his memoir, published five years after he had left the White House. No official, declassified documents countered his version of events. Regardless of how the plan was shaped and came into existence, the administration encouraged the gathering of information about various activist groups and used it to quiet their opposition. Mark Rudd and Bill Ayers, fugitive members of the Weather Collective, shared memories of coming home to apartments that had been ransacked or having to use public phones to avoid wiretaps from 1970 and beyond.<sup>98</sup> The use of undercover informants continued past the days of the formal SDS; the VVAW encountered the same

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<sup>95</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 272-474.

<sup>96</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 474-475.

<sup>97</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 475.

<sup>98</sup> Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 217-232.

types of individuals masquerading as veterans during their first major protest, Operation RAW – standing for “Rapid American Withdrawal” – in the fall of 1970.<sup>99</sup> The Huston plan and other forms of surveillance that the Nixon Administration promoted ensured they were one step ahead of any organization that threatened their progress in Indochina. The possibility of violence and murder was strong motivation to continue extreme forms of monitoring activists, but the number of people participating in radical protest were far fewer than the number of people who were victims of Nixon’s tactics. But Nixon had greater problems outside of vehement domestic criticism as Vietnam’s two neighbors to their west, Laos and Cambodia, began to politically crumble under pressure from the North Vietnamese.

The expansion of the Vietnam War by Nixon and Kissinger was twofold; first Laos in February and then Cambodia in April. The president had expanded into Cambodia within months of his inauguration but these military moves in 1970 differed; they were made public. Nixon had maneuvered comfortably in 1969 dropping bombs into neutral countries and received little backlash from the anti war movement that amounted to any real constraint on his abilities to conduct war; he easily justified expanding by claiming his desire to defend American lives against the North Vietnamese aggressors. However, Nixon’s confidence in his decision to advance into both Laos and Cambodia created a domestic backlash unpredictable to administration officials.

Nixon and Kissinger watched the North Vietnamese rapidly expand into the Plain of Jars area of Central Laos in the beginning of 1970; the administration responded by unleashing B-52s over Laotian borders to prevent a communist victory within the

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<sup>99</sup> Gerald Nicosia, *Home to War: A history of the Vietnam Veterans Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2001), 58-72.

country.<sup>100</sup> Not only did American air power rumble overhead, Operation Prairie Fire was implemented to disrupt ongoing infiltrations of the North Vietnamese into South Vietnam by using the Ho Chi Minh trail.<sup>101</sup> The domestic response was as expected. Critics within the peace movement, Congress and the media accused the administration of expanding the war into neutral countries bordering Vietnam; an argument Kissinger agreed with but felt they could not publicly admit as it would ruin their prospects during secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese.<sup>102</sup> To add fuel to the domestic fire, on March 6th, 1970, Nixon issued a statement titled “About the Situation in Laos”<sup>103</sup> which appeared to be an effort to calm the public outcry and reassure Americans that it was not only necessary to ensure safety for American military personnel in Vietnam but he did not expand the war at all, eliminating any risk for American casualties. In fact, foolishly, Nixon stated there had been “no combat deaths in Laos” which turned out to be false.<sup>104</sup> Operation Prairie Fire had resulted in a few American deaths<sup>105</sup> and the media was quick to jump on this falsehood. Nixon’s attempt at soothing the public into supporting his expansion of war in Laos failed. Regardless, in March, after his misstep with the press

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<sup>100</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 453.

<sup>101</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 455-456.

<sup>102</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 453.

<sup>103</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Editorial Note, Document 197.*

<sup>104</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Editorial Note, Document 197.*

<sup>105</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 455-456.

and American public, he overrode government agencies and sent Thai troops into Laos to stop the progress of the North Vietnamese with the peace movement hardly challenging this decision.<sup>106</sup>

Historical hindsight illustrated the expansion into Laos was a precursor to what happened a few months later, but on a far milder scale. The movement's attempts to contain the fighting to Vietnam, while demanding immediate withdrawal, failed. Nixon and his men believed the threat of communism in Laos as crippling to their goals in Indochina and did what they felt necessary, knowing their actions would create outcry within the United States. Up to this point, especially during the first six months of 1969, the peace movement successfully contained the onslaught of further aggression in Vietnam by applying enough pressure on the president to have him second guess operations he originally desired to implement. With U.S. airpower, and eventually combat forces, moving into Laos and Cambodia, the achievement of containing the government was lost. And Nixon was not finished. Little did the anti war movement know, Nixon issued two decisive blows; crippling the peace movement before their second student-led revival.

On March 18th, 1970 the former leader of Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk, was ousted from power while away in France and the Soviet Union in a bloodless coup led by General Lon Nol.<sup>107</sup> Lon Nol was vehemently against a North Vietnamese presence

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<sup>106</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting (Washington DC: March 26, 1970, 2:34-3:06pm), Document 213.*

<sup>107</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National*

within Cambodia, in clear agreement with the opposition the U.S. was currently voicing, and spent most of April courting American aid to rid his country of the communist invaders<sup>108</sup>; a position that convinced the North Vietnamese the Americans were behind the coup, although Nixon and Kissinger denied any knowledge beforehand.<sup>109</sup> April was a tough month for the administration, as they floundered back and forth, sorting through pros and cons of providing aid, equipment or combat forces to Cambodia. Nixon alleviated the pressure by announcing on April 20th, 1970 he would remove a total of 150,000 troops over the next year.<sup>110</sup> He proposed that the announcement supported administration claims that Vietnamization was progressing enough that they could safely remove more U.S. combat forces.<sup>111</sup> However, the announcement equally issued a blow to the peace movement as much as it boasted the successes of Vietnamization, by attempting to portray the war as de-escalating rather than expanding.

Shortly before the announcement, Nixon decided, against his original wishes, to not attend his daughter's graduation in fear that protesters would injure the president and disrupt the whole ceremony for the entire graduating class.<sup>112</sup> Again, demonstrators

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Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: March 19, 1970), Document 205.

<sup>108</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the Senior Military Assistant (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 1, 1970), Document 217-245.*

<sup>109</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 447.

<sup>110</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 448.

<sup>111</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 448.

<sup>112</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 447.

agitated the president politically and had interfered with a father attending his child's graduation; Nixon wrote after skipping Julie's celebration and in preparation for the withdrawal announcement: "that the time had come to drop a bombshell on the gathering spring storm of antiwar protests."<sup>113</sup> By April 13, when Nixon announced the removal of more troops<sup>114</sup>, the turmoil in Cambodia was brewing for over a month. Nixon and his cabinet debated entering Cambodia with American military forces to deter further development of North Vietnamese strongholds throughout the country, especially along the border.<sup>115</sup> This clear and documented timeline of events supported the president's contemplation of entering Cambodia with U.S. fighting units, further expanding the war in Indochina. B-52 strikes varied dramatically from actual American troops marching into Cambodia and fighting the same war they were in Vietnam. Even though the president slipped through the situation in Laos with little political damage, he knew circumstances in Cambodia would result in a bigger outcry from the peace movement. In fact, key cabinet members like Secretary of State Laird favored "avoiding direct involvement" and if aid was issued to Lon Nol it "should be limited and tightly controlled to avoid

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<sup>113</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 448.

<sup>114</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970*, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: April 13, 1970), Document 228.

<sup>115</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970*, Memorandum from the Senior Military Assistant (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 1, 1970), Document 217-227.

widening the Southeast Asia conflict and inciting US anti-war sentiment.”<sup>116</sup> He needed something to deflate the peace movement before he proceeded with a policy that would shatter American hopes that the war was winding down. The announcement that up to 150,000 men would return over the next year countered criticism that Nixon’s goal was to win in Indochina by expanding the war. Although publicly Nixon’s April 20th declaration relied on the successes of Vietnamization, declassified documents and the president’s own reflections support the notion that the announcement involved containing the peace movement and furthering the president’s policy in Vietnam.

The decision to enter Cambodia with both American and ARVN troops was difficult. A mere eight days before the Cambodian operation went into effect, Rogers, Laird, Nixon and Kissinger were undecided on what avenue they would take to counter DRV advancements. Although there are no official notes from the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) meeting on April 22nd, Kissinger reflected in his memoirs that people jumped back and forth on supporting different options but “domestic reaction to action in Cambodia loomed heavily during the meeting.”<sup>117</sup> A memo issued the same day warned the president “US troops in Cambodia would have a strong and damaging political effect in the US which would hurt the president’s Vietnam policies and divide the country further.”<sup>118</sup> The president, and the men that influenced his decisions, put

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<sup>116</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon (Washington DC: April 4, 1970), Document 221.*

<sup>117</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Editorial Note, Document 248.*

<sup>118</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from Roger Morris, Winston Lord, and Anthony*



heavy emphasis on how moving into Cambodia would not only ignite the peace movement but it would damage his run in 1972 and push the country further into irreversible turmoil. As experienced in early 1969, the reputation of the peace movement and their impact on a president's career and foreign policies threatened limitation on how the government maneuvered in Indochina. However, the president's judgement on the dangers of DRV progression throughout Cambodia outweighed the peace movement's looming presence. By April 26th, Nixon and Kissinger decided joint ARVN-American forces, accompanied by American logistical and tactical support would enter two Cambodian locations, the Parrot's Beak – this operation only containing ARVN forces - and the Fish Hook, to eradicate ammunition stockpiles in DRV sanctuaries along the border.<sup>119</sup> The decision would become public with Nixon taking the airwaves, joined by visual aids and maps of Indochina, on April 30th, 1970. The president and his men, aware that some form of domestic protest would erupt after April 30th, were not prepared for the level of activism that exploded from the campuses to the streets, forever changing how Nixon conducted the war in the final years of his presidency.

The peace movement exploded into action, starting on college campuses nationwide, organizing dissidence and protest through their usual tactics of sit-ins, teach-ins, leafleting, and public demonstrations. However, the response to the government's announcement differed from spouts of activism seen up until May of 1970. The sheer volume of not only students but the number of campuses participating in protests and

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Lake of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 22, 1970), Document 250.

<sup>119</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, National Security Council Decision Memorandum 57* (Washington DC: April 26, 1970), Document 260-267.

obstructing daily operations was shocking; by mid-May 500 campuses were actively protesting with 1,000 in total by the end of the month.<sup>120</sup> It was no longer only SDS or their anti war chapters participating in campus demonstrations. According to the Scranton Commission, who later investigated the aftermath of Cambodia, 75% of students on college campuses favored student protest.<sup>121</sup> Although most protesters restricted their activism to vocal dissatisfaction with the administration's decision, only a few moved into the realm of civil disobedience. However, those that chose to resort to bombs, fire or violence shook the administration as it prepared for the dissension of activists into the country's capital on May 9th.

Violence, property destruction and vandalism increased on the campuses in the first days after the move into Cambodia. Radical students and activists resorting to violent forms of protests were familiar to American society but the level of chaos that was experienced during the month of May was unprecedented. Students bombed and burned both ROTC and university buildings alike, broke into and occupied campus buildings and combated the National Guard that were called onto a multitudes of college campuses by university faculty, protecting their calm students from a dangerous threat.<sup>122</sup> This mentality that students were the real threat to peace, not the government marching American men over Vietnamese borders, created the atmosphere of hostility and fear in which students died both in Ohio and Mississippi. On May 4th, 1970, after days of

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<sup>120</sup> George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (New York: South End Press, 1987), 88.

<sup>121</sup> Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, 90.

<sup>122</sup> Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, 88.

turmoil and smoldering buildings in the wake of irate student protest, the National Guard marched onto Kent State's campus to detain the spread of violence. Instead, fearful and unsure, the guardsmen open fired on a group of students, some protesting, some curious bystanders, killing four. Eleven days later, unreported and underrepresented in the outrage that followed Kent State, two students were killed in their dormitory rooms at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi after police open fired on the building in response to student protest.<sup>123</sup> Kent State cracked the nation wide open. It not only outraged students, activists and the peace movement as a whole but it shook average Americans who had stood idle, unsure of how to progress in times of unrest. No longer were young men dying in the jungles of Indochina, but now the government was unleashing its own military on student opposition at home.

And as the American home front struggled to survive in the wake of Cambodia and Kent State, the Nixon administration, astonished and worn, scrambled to mend the damage their decisions had wreaked. Kissinger and Nixon, torn and plagued with turmoil over their decision to enter the Fish Hook with American forces, experienced exhaustion facing a new wave of domestic anti war sentiment.<sup>124</sup> Nixon was hit from all sides of the American structure; the media blamed the president and his excursion for the troubled state of the American home front, Congress was hurriedly constructing bills to restrict the president's abilities in Cambodia and the rest of Indochina while officials within his own

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<sup>123</sup> Tom Hayden, *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 75-77.

<sup>124</sup> Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 513-514.

administration, and their families, resigned and protested in the face of his decision.<sup>125</sup>

And as the president crumbled domestically, his own actions, in tandem with other public figures who were meant to de-escalate the unrest, enraged the already hot anti war movement.

Young Americans died on a college campus. Instead of listening to their youth, the local and national government welcomed guns and bullets onto college campuses to quiet the opposition. Nixon made a disturbing comment to reporters at the Pentagon on May 1, 1970 regarding the protesters demonstrating in light of Cambodia:

“You see these bums, you know, blowing up the campuses. Listen, the boys that are on the college campuses today are the luckiest people in the world, going to the greatest universities, and here they are burning up books, storming around about this issues. You name it. Get rid of the war there will be another one.”<sup>126</sup>

Although the entire quote, which was often distorted or hacked up to support a theory that all student protesters were bums, revealed Nixon’s true intent – that those protesting who resorted to violence were viewed negatively by the president – but it also portrayed a dismissal of concerns that the youth had in terms of Vietnam. Nixon’s inability to defend civil and peaceful student protest, or at the very least acknowledge the difference between the two extremes, alienated a large section of American citizens from his policies in Indochina. In New York, working class individuals, nicknamed “the hard hats” confronted protesters with brutal violence; after Agnew’s congratulatory response to their behavior, it was clear the administration supported their efforts in literally beating down

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<sup>125</sup> Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 512-517.

<sup>126</sup> De Onis, Juan. “Nixon puts ‘Bums’ Label on Some College Radicals.” *New York Times*, May 2, 1970.

the youth resistance.<sup>127</sup> To further encourage confusion among the weary public, Press Secretary Ron Ziegler addressed the Kent State shootings during a press briefing with an insensitive conclusion: “[the Kent State murders] should remind us all once again that when dissent turns to violence, it invites tragedy.”<sup>128</sup> This comment forcefully pushed all the blame of the four dead at Kent State, and the two in Mississippi, on the protesters. That opposing a government’s decision and resorting to demonstrating on a college campus in the heart of middle America was so offensive that the proper response was shooting down students. It is true that a few used property destruction and radical behavior to emphasize their distress. However, blindly shooting into a group of students, many who were not even involved in the peaceful protest, let alone practicing any violence, was justified by the White House. Instead of rallying Americans to the side of the president, their comments and actions during the first two weeks of May continued the upward escalation of a passionate and anguished peace movement.

The unrest that followed his commitment to move into Cambodia disrupted Nixon’s ability to function successfully as the Commander in Chief. As Nixon attempted to publicly discredit the student-led reaction, private correspondence and diary entries revealed the angst it was causing the president. As soon as Nixon was informed about the deaths at Kent State, he feared it was his foreign policy move that was to blame; he expressed “hoping rioters had provoked the shooting, but no real evidence they did, except throwing rocks at the National Guard.”<sup>129</sup> More than just students presented a

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<sup>127</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 426.

<sup>128</sup> Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 511.

<sup>129</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 141.

problem in their denouncement of his Cambodian policy. University presidents begged the president to immediately withdrawal from Vietnam along with clergy-men, business professionals and union leaders.<sup>130</sup> Although the students sparked the outrage, it extended much further than the campuses, creating a major headache for the president. It's one thing to brand and discredit a large amount of students as dirty, bomb-throwing, ungrateful bums but impossible to silence members of his own silent majority that he courted only six months before. The weekend following the Kent State killings, thousands of students were anticipated to descend on Washington in what many within the administration predicted to be violent and destructive;<sup>131</sup> the administration was prepared for a full student siege with over sixty buses lining the White House as protective armor.<sup>132</sup> As students began gathering on the Mall, near the Lincoln Memorial, a sleep deprived and troubled president wandered down to speak with a few youths, unaccompanied, and shocking those in Washington who came to denounce the very man who stood in front of them.<sup>133</sup> Although the president's personal memoirs recount the encounter as productive, everyone else, including Kissinger and Haldeman<sup>134</sup> felt it was an odd act of a leader hindered by his health in the wake of extreme domestic outrage.

May 9th came and went, with the worst-case scenarios of fire, bombs and destruction never coming to fruition. The MOBE (National Mobilization Committee to

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<sup>130</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 427.

<sup>131</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 195.

<sup>132</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 511-512.

<sup>133</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 461-466.

<sup>134</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 195-196.

End the War in Vietnam), who quickly organized the demonstration in Washington in the wake of the Kent State killings, were pleased with a turnout of over 100,000 but concluded it “a failure of nerve” to launch the demonstration from a rally to a day of change with very few participating in civil disobedience.<sup>135</sup> This sentiment was supported by the administration’s perspective on the demonstration. Haldeman reflected a day later, on May 10th, that the president communicated the demonstrations failed to live up to their full potential and the movement had overplayed its hand<sup>136</sup> while private correspondence between Kissinger and Nixon on May 11th revealed Nixon stating “I don’t think this whole university thing has reached as many people as they think.”<sup>137</sup> Although the May 9 demonstrations were impressive in the turnout and how quickly the activists organized a national protest in such a short timeframe. However, the movement reached its peak that weekend and quickly declined with members reflecting: “From the outside, the movement may have appeared as a threat to national security, but the high water mark had passed.”<sup>138</sup> The demonstration reminded the government the impact the movement could have on American society but it lacked in accomplishing anything new. America found complacency with five years of demonstrations and the march on Washington to denounce U.S. involvement in Cambodia fell into a familiar pattern the

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<sup>135</sup> Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, 88.

<sup>136</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 196-197.

<sup>137</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: May 11, 1970, 5:40pm), Document 287.*

<sup>138</sup> Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, 89.

movement continued to rely on. On May 13th, Nixon, surviving the worst of the movement's vengeance, authorized a total of eight operations in Cambodia, knowing his administration had paid the price for simply entering the county and should reap as much benefit as possible in a small window of execution.<sup>139</sup> However, those killed during the May uprising would not perish without teaching the president a valuable lesson. The lives lost in Ohio reverberated deeper with Nixon, Kissinger and Congress, creating legislative change, more than the outpour of youth on May 9th did. Even if the war drug on for a few more years, which it did, Nixon calculated his movements throughout Indochina with enough care to discourage another reaction he had experienced during May of 1970.

Kent State ignited the peace movement with a new passion and brought together various groups of citizens that had been at odds since 1965. As students raged, night and day, Congress, rejuvenated by the youth's leadership and feeling the pressures within the domestic fracture, challenged Nixon's choice to enter Cambodia. The Cooper-Church amendment was introduced in May, 1970, restricting the president's decision and demanding that all American troops were withdrawn from Cambodia no later than June 30th, 1970.<sup>140</sup> Another piece of legislation severed all funding to Vietnam by the end of 1970 – with the end date pushed to December of 1971 – however, the bill never passed through Congress.<sup>141</sup> Once passed, these two pieces of legislation did little to actually

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<sup>139</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: May 13, 1970), Document 291.*

<sup>140</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 467.

<sup>141</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 427-428.



impact results coming out of Vietnam or thwarting the president's expansion of the war, however, they portrayed a shift in Congress as more representatives began to move past communicated disagreement to tangible action. The Cooper-Church amendment frightened Nixon into accepting a June 30th deadline before the amendment was even passed; Kissinger, frustrated, stated: "The panicky decision to set a June 30 deadline for the removal of our forces from Cambodia was a concrete result of public pressure."<sup>142</sup> The peace movement projected their voices beyond the White House. They were demanding all people in power to bring American troops home and end the war. Congress could answer this call as they did in 1970 by introducing bills and amendments that limited Nixon's abilities in Vietnam and revoke funding for the ongoing war. The beginning stages of congressional dissidence was a huge win for the peace movement. Someone had heard, listened and defended their position. For a group of people who felt excluded from traditional politics, on both sides of the aisle, the congressional response to Kent State and Cambodia produced a gradual realignment between liberal politicians and left-wing activists<sup>143</sup> who were both aiming to accomplish the same goal; stop Nixon and end the war in Vietnam.

The remainder of the year was quiet for the traditional peace movement. Their ramp up fizzled out quickly after Nixon removed American troops from Cambodia and continued with scheduled troop withdrawals. Their momentum was spent. They were back to square one again, unable to find creativity in accomplishing a complete end to the war in Indochina. With Kissinger's meetings with the North Vietnamese still secret to the

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<sup>142</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 516.

<sup>143</sup> Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, 91.

public, the student activists left school for summer and American protest was once again quiet. However, a new group of activists were gaining popularity among a forgotten clique of men: the veterans. And as the second half of 1970 proved to be a cooling off period for the student-led peace movement, the final months of the year were just the beginning for the Vietnam Veterans against the War.

The VVAW was born on April 15, 1967 with only 6 men claiming membership, under the veteran and leader, Jan Barry.<sup>144</sup> The organization spent the last years of the 1960s struggling with what most other anti war organizations suffered from: lack of funding, difference in politics and finding exposure.<sup>145</sup> Despite their troubles, the ushering in of a new decade welcomed many returning vets disillusioned by their wartime experiences and needing a safe space to voice their struggles. These problems extended beyond PTSD or moral dilemmas that the war had forced upon them; Vietnam veterans, plagued with missing limbs and health problems as a result of chemical warfare, returned to decrepit and inefficient VAs, a society to which they were unable to find jobs and for many, a nasty drug addiction developed in the rice paddies of Vietnam.<sup>146</sup> The VVAW provided a home for veterans and a political jumping-off point for many young men who felt their experiences in Vietnam, often resulting in their turn from pro-war patriot to anti war activist, needed to be vocalized to an ignorant public; 1970 proved to be the year. Like many others who had not participated in demonstrations, the killings at

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<sup>144</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 6-14.

<sup>145</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 14-37.

<sup>146</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 34-40.

Kent State radicalized a lot of stateside veterans.<sup>147</sup> They had anticipated blood, death and destruction during their tours in Vietnam but few fathomed their own National Guard was involved in suppressing youthful opposition on American college campuses. Membership exploded in 1970; universities were ripe for recruiting as veterans returned home to resume a normal life.<sup>148</sup> The veterans differed from their student counterparts in they had dramatically different experiences. Nixon and Kissinger often branded the protesters as righteous, entitled and unaware. This label could not be pinned on returning vets. They paid their dues, gave to their country and returned aware of the discrepancies and misinformation their government was feeding them. Nixon portrayed the war a certain way and the American people had few avenues to discredit his claims. Veterans disrupted the official stance and challenged it with their own experiences. Therefore, as more veterans joined the anti war movement, they created a serious problem and a potent threat for the Nixon Administration.

In September, 1970, months after Americans crossed back over from Cambodia into Vietnam and the volcanic unrest following Kent State returned to an underlying simmer, the VVAW launched their first organized protest. In early 1970, a forum was created to address the rapidly growing drug problem among active soldiers and returning veterans; it received no media attention and was dubbed a failure.<sup>149</sup> Coming into September, leaders of the VVAW, Joe Urgo and Al Hubbard, knew future action would have to be unique to catch the attention of the media, the president and the general public.

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<sup>147</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 51-52.

<sup>148</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 53.

<sup>149</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 55.

Hubbard, like most veterans, was not shocked when news broke of My Lai, but knew that Americans were ignorant to the regularity of war atrocities committed in Vietnam by American soldiers; to break away from boring demonstration tactics, Hubbard envisioned Operation RAW – half theater, half march – where Vietnam veterans would walk from New Jersey to Pennsylvania as if they were humping the Vietnamese countryside to enlighten American citizens as to what average, “good” American soldiers did during their tours.<sup>150</sup> Operation RAW was a mixed bag of positives and negatives. The march only attracted limited media attention, mostly local, and the veterans walked away feeling they had not converted anyone to their cause.<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, changing people’s minds was not necessarily the main goal. The demonstration made people think and question their current position on the war in Vietnam; it also propelled the organization into recognition with the public and attracted some of VVAW’s future financial and personal influencers like Jane Fonda and John Kerry.<sup>152</sup> And similar to other anti war groups, such as SDS or MOBE, exposure to learning, trial and error or meeting other veteran activists contributed to their future success. And as they began to establish themselves as a serious, influential piece of the anti war movement with Operation RAW, larger figures in the American society, such as the president of the United States, would eventually hear their battle cries.

For VVAW, 1970 was the beginning of their upward climb. As radical activist and Hollywood elite, Jane Fonda, became entrenched in their organization, the veterans

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<sup>150</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 58.

<sup>151</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 66-67.

<sup>152</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 69-72.

spent the fall of 1970 and winter of 1971 preparing their next move in exposing American wrongdoing in Vietnam. Their debut was critical to the longevity of a weak and floundering movement. Kent State proved to be the last push for many tired and disenchanted activists. The movement, to survive under Nixon and a never-ending war, needed a group like the Vietnam veterans. And as the years leading up to the 1972 election will prove, the United States government had credible fear in the power that these young men had.

The rest of 1970 appeared calmer in the wake of Cambodia and Kent State. And in some truth, it was. After American forces left Cambodia at the end of June, it was business as normal. After a brief suspension by the North Vietnamese in May, Kissinger and Thuy continued their private meeting in Paris to find an honorable end to the war. Nixon and his men furrowed and tormented on how to continue withdrawing men without being beaten down militarily by Hanoi. And some activists, mostly students and veterans, continued to apply pressure on elected officials. However, the autumn months were not as quiet as they seemed. Trouble was brewing with Cambodia's northern neighbor Laos, and Nixon could not ignore the possible threat a communist takeover in that country would pose to South Vietnam.<sup>153</sup> From September 11th through September 14th American Special Forces and ARVN ground troops entered Southeast Laos to hinder DRV forces and their depleted ammunition stock; Operation Tailwind was

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<sup>153</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972*, Memorandum from John H. Holdridge and Richard T. Kennedy to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: October 16, 1970), Document 50-56.

celebrated as a success within the administration.<sup>154</sup> Unlike Cambodia, the operation was much smaller in both the number of men who participated from the United States and the number of days they spent inside of Laos. The president kept the operation from the public and there are no documented cases of student protest specific to Operation Tailwind. If veterans, students or any anti war activists felt outrage by the move into another foreign country other than Cambodia, it remained unknown in their diary entries, memoirs, correspondences, or interviews. Nixon learned from Cambodia, as he had experienced in 1969 when he quietly and quickly ran operations outside of South Vietnam, that if few American lives were lost, secrecy was the best method to protect himself and provide his administration the security to move freely.

The final months of 1970 saw attempts, often unsuccessful, at strategic success for the Nixon Administration. On October 7th Nixon announced on television a “major new initiative for peace” with a new five-point peace proposal.<sup>155</sup> The proposal differed from Nixon’s previous public stance with the DRV by welcoming a cease-fire in place only in South Vietnam instead of demanding a mutual withdrawal of all fighting forces.<sup>156</sup> This announcement was interesting as it was anticipated, privately, to not amount to anything productive for the U.S. lawmakers; Nixon told Kissinger: “I don’t

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<sup>154</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum from John H. Holdridge and Richard T. Kennedy to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: October 16, 1970), Document 50.*

<sup>155</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Editorial Note, Document 46.*

<sup>156</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Editorial Note, Document 46.*

think a cease-fire is worth a damn.”<sup>157</sup> However, it showed American citizens the president was attempting to settle the war by any means. He was adjusting his expectations to find compromise with the North without completely capitulating. A cease-fire amounts to a drastically different outcome as American forces continue to exit Vietnam. A withdrawal of DRV forces back across the DMZ was a secure solution. A cease-fire is far riskier. It would leave capable fighting forces in South Vietnam, able to resume their take-over once the threat of American forces was gone. The end of 1970 marked a shift in U.S. stance during negotiations. A demand for unilateral withdrawal was not a feasible tactic as Hanoi was not anticipating it. As documents and the progression of 1971 into 1972 proved, the only way Nixon and Kissinger could find a compromise with the North Vietnamese was to settle on a cease-fire in place with an agreed upon timetable to ensure Hanoi’s troops would remain neutral to the South long enough to secure American troops that would exit the country and protect Nixon’s legacy before and directly after the 1972 election. This strategy is identified by many historians, thanks to declassified documents lending the name, as “the decent interval theory” and the beginning stages of this new approach by Nixon and Kissinger emerged with the October 7th peace proposal announcement.

Nixon discredited critic’s accusations against the president in the death of the students at Kent State in the fall of 1970. A week after his peace plan announcement, a Grand Jury indicted 25 students from Kent State for rioting while the guardsmen avoided

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<sup>157</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Editorial Note, Document 46.*

citation for any wrongdoing.<sup>158</sup> This legal action supported Nixon's quest to discredit the demonstrations and paint them as the real villain in May, not himself. At the end of October, the president was in Northern California for a rally and went head to head with protesters; Nixon mounted his car flashing two fingers in the infamous "V" for victory symbol and the demonstrators pelted rocks at his car while vandalizing local businesses.<sup>159</sup> The president perceived the property damage inflicted to the community, along with their violent response to Nixon himself, played right into the story that instigators and troublemakers were the activists, not government officials.<sup>160</sup> At this point in Nixon's Vietnam narrative, the Pentagon Papers had not been published. Many Americans believed the information their government told them. And Nixon had evidence of vandalism and visual images of rocks smashing into his retreating car to support his claims. Unaware of his strategy, manipulation or deception used in the ongoing confrontation between peace activists and the president, these series of events bolstered Nixon while cutting down the movement.

In November, a secret mission, dubbed Operation Kingpin, was planned for November 20th, U.S. special forces infiltrated a known U.S. POW camp and their intention was to save 60 captured men and held prisoner during the war.<sup>161</sup> The mission

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<sup>158</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 242.

<sup>159</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 245.

<sup>160</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 245.

<sup>161</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum from the President's Assistant National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: November 18, 1970), Document 71.*



failed; American forces entered a deserted POW camp and left empty handed.<sup>162</sup> It could have been a positive break for the administration if the mission was successful. Heroic men risked their lives to rescue the abused, beaten and poorly treated POWs and brought them home to their families. A successful outcome, especially since the administration had been using the POWs as a justification for continuing the war, would boost Nixon's approval numbers and provide him enough support to make his next moves with little hesitation on how the public would react. Instead of returning with tails tucked between their legs, the U.S. participated in heavy bombing of North Vietnam while agreeing to keep their failed mission to rescue POWs a secret; however, Hanoi reported the bombardment despite the U.S. stance that it was in retaliation of the DRV shooting down U.S. planes.<sup>163</sup> Activists and weary Americans were outraged with the newest military aggression inflicted on the North; cleverly, Nixon attempted to combat the negative response by revealing Operation Kingpin but the negative results lent little in sympathy from the domestically agitated.<sup>164</sup> For Nixon, and the peace movement, it was one step forward and one step back with little momentum gained by either side throughout the remainder of 1970. The White House made a glaring error and the anti war activist quickly jumped on it with little mercy. When desperation and frustrated bubbled up, resulting in violence and chaos from the side of the peace seekers, Nixon quickly

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<sup>162</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Editorial Note, Document 72.*

<sup>163</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: November 21, 1970, 11:45am), Document 74.*

<sup>164</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 254.

exploited their actions to gain support. The two extremes used their justification for their actions as a massive tug-o-war, resulting in constant societal instability as the war continued to rage in Southeast Asia.

For Nixon, 1970 was the darkest year of his presidency.<sup>165</sup> Although he made great strides by continuing contact with the DRV through secret meetings with Kissinger in Paris, other decisions shaped the conduct of the war leading up to the 1972 elections. It is clear that Nixon felt it necessary to invade Cambodia and after the fact, believed it achieved what it was designed to do. Three months after the retreat of American men from Cambodia, Nixon confidently told his National Security Advisor: “Listen, Henry, Cambodia won the war.”<sup>166</sup> He had taken a gamble, convinced the fall of Cambodia to DRV would jeopardize the security of South Vietnam, and it had paid off. But at what cost?

Nixon watched as universities across the country erupted in passionate dissent, resulting in several deaths on various American campuses. Many people who stood idly by, unsure of what side to back, were propelled into vocalizing their disagreement with the current administration after seeing their own youth dead at the hands of their own military. People outside of the college campuses, ranging from business men to union leaders, saw the threat of an unchecked president who expanded the war at a whim. University presidents, plagued with constant demonstrations and often targets of the student-lead peace movement, collectively argued for an end to the war to save their campuses from a downward spiral of destruction. The anti war activists pushed

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<sup>165</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 457.

<sup>166</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Editorial Note, Document 46.*

congressional members to act, finally, against the president's actions. They used legislative and legal practices to restrain the Cambodian excursion and threatened to cut off all funding if the president continued to behave as if his actions had no consequences. Much like 1969, the anti war movement did not end the war. But it did limit the aggression that the president unleashed throughout Southeast Asia after Cambodia. The American led operation in Cambodia was not seen again. The anti war movement taught the president that their actions may not sway him personally but they could impact other powerful men who were fully capable of hindering the executive powers within Indochina.

The peace movement grew from a student-led movement to encompassing members of an influential group of men. The veterans, who watched Cambodia and Kent State in horror, rallied to form an organization that greatly threatened Nixon's domestic support. They shed light on elements of the war that the media and the government were unable or unwilling to. Their service and sacrifice could not be undercut by the White House. Their medals, missing legs and emotional scars brought a level of credibility to their dissidence that the students were unable to obtain. Their growth, gaining momentum in 1970, challenged the propaganda that the president promoted to fuel the war forward. Their activism put a new restraint on the administration and provided a tension that only increased as more veterans returned from overseas and joined the movement.

Despite the constant instability that emerged in 1970, the peace movement concluded another year with their goal unaccomplished and the war still claiming Vietnamese and American lives. However, their activism woke new factions that put thicker barriers up. Now Nixon had to show further caution and decisive decision-making

when executing his next move on all fronts of the war. The unrest that stemmed from Cambodia on the campuses, in the business world, among veterans and within Congress provided more enemies for the Nixon Administration to counter with every foreign policy decision they made. And as 1972 inched closer, Nixon struggled with the impossible balance of winning the war in Vietnam and keeping enough support at home to ensure his election to another term. The peace movement possessed power in their corner, especially after the Cambodian incursion, to threaten the president's future success in Indochina and destroy both his reputation and his career.

## Chapter VI.

### Lam Son 719, the Pentagon Papers and the Growth of the VVAW within the Peace Movement

President Nixon closed out 1970 tortured by the unrest that plagued his Vietnam policy among students, veterans, the media and Congress. He supported an American-led move into Cambodia and paid the price heavily at home. Even though Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger walked away from the Cambodian excursion with a firm conviction that their move was not only right, but successful, both men learned valuable lessons on how far they could push U.S. combat forces throughout Indochina. However, 1971 mirrored the previous years with only minor modifications: negotiations drug on between Kissinger and the DRV, the peace movement rose and fell while constantly challenging Nixon's Vietnam policy and the administration launched yet another cross-border offensive in attempts to rattle the North Vietnamese into a weakened negotiating position. Although, the VVAW made a mighty stand in the spring of 1971 at the footsteps of Nixon's White House that re-shaped both the movement itself and how the majority of Americans, and those elected officials in powerful places, viewed the ongoing war in Vietnam.

As the decision-makers within the U.S. government ended 1970 preparing an offensive move against the North Vietnamese, it secured an eventful start to another year of war making. The dry season in Vietnam, spanning from November into May, provided the best time for the DRV to execute an attack on the U.S. and its allies. For example, the

most infamous DRV offensive in the history of the Vietnam War occurred during the dry season of 1968, dubbed “The Tet Offensive” and resulted in a stalemate that convinced many Americans that the war was unwinnable. Embarking on its third full year in the White House, the Nixon Administration began planning in late 1970 and early 1971 an operation that put allied forces on the side of the aggressive instigator and disrupt enemy movement along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Kissinger argued his idea was to launch a safer offensive into Cambodia but White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig, U.S.

Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker and South Vietnamese President Thieu countered with a riskier move into Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail off near the DMZ.<sup>167</sup> Unlike the Cambodian Operation in 1970, the United States was limited in their use of American combat forces; only the ARVN entered Laos to engage the enemy while the U.S. was restricted to air and logistical support.<sup>168</sup> This adjustment, however, was not credited to lessons learned from the violence and backlash Nixon felt in the wake of Kent State after Cambodia. Congressional pressure manifested into restrictive policy that prohibited the president to freely move men wherever he pleased in Indochina. On January 21st Congress introduced legislation blocking the U.S. from providing air or sea support and reintroduced the Vietnam Disengagement. Act with an adjusted end date of December 31st, 1971.<sup>169</sup> By February 9th, days after Lam Son 719 had been

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<sup>167</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 990-991.

<sup>168</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1970-January 1972, Memorandum for the President’s File by the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) (Washington DC: January 19, 1971), Document 104.*

<sup>169</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1000.

implemented, Congress successfully passed legislation prohibiting the direct use of any U.S. forces in Laos, in which Kissinger reflected: “All the time, a flood of congressional resolutions sought to cut off any flexibility or freedom of maneuver.”<sup>170</sup> For the administration, it was a clear frustration that Congress restricted their ability to execute operations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail they felt imperative to safeguarding Vietnamization and protecting the South Vietnamese government. But for the peace movement, this was a victory. Starting after Cambodia and Kent State, the movement saw results from their protest with Congress directly challenging the president’s foreign policy. Now, as Nixon attempted to widen the war only six months after the outcry from Cambodia had settled, Congress limited how much damage Nixon could do. He was legally prohibited from committing American combat forces to operations across South Vietnamese borders and new resolutions emerged out of Congress more than ever before. Nixon, aware of the movement’s achievements by pressuring Congressional representatives, blamed restrictions on “the problem of American domestic opinion” and concluded “the Laotian operation, which turned out to be a military success but a public relations disaster.”<sup>171</sup>

However, the administration decided to spin it during private conversations, memorandums, and meetings or even in retrospect while authoring a memoir – Operation Lam Son 719 fell short of their desired achievement. The operation was to last the majority of the dry season and intended to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail to such a degree that this disruption would handicap the North Vietnamese from mounting an offensive in

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<sup>170</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1002.

<sup>171</sup> Nixon, *The Memoir of Richard M. Nixon*, 498.

both 1971 and 1972. Lam Son's success held hopes of ensuring enough security and time for the continued build up of ARVN forces while American troops continued their gradual withdrawal. Within five days ARVN forces were unable to penetrate the Laotian border any further than ten miles from their starting point.<sup>172</sup> ARVN forces quickly captured Tchepone, abandoned it, and once the South Vietnamese government accepted their casualty rate had reached its max<sup>173</sup>, concluded the operation in a panicked fashion, weeks before U.S. decision-makers intended, with the most memorable images being ARVN soldiers clinging to helicopter skids during aerial evacuations.<sup>174</sup> U.S. intelligence during the operation was faulty at best, leaving leaders to conclude the ARVN's quest into Laos had produced results that later were impossible to support. In an undated memorandum, likely between March 1st and March 3rd, from Kissinger to Nixon, the National Security Advisor reported positive feedback on the South Vietnamese performance; ARVN troops fought well, halted DRV forces, U.S. airpower was strong and the weather the only reason for modification.<sup>175</sup> This was not an anomaly. Memorandums, backchannel messages and general assessments pertaining to the Laotian Operation as late as March 16th reported the overall atmosphere as good or positive.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1003.

<sup>173</sup> Kissinger, *White House years*, 1003.

<sup>174</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 497-499.

<sup>175</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972*, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: undated), Document 143.

<sup>176</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972*, Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon



Clearly, the operation was stalling and crumbling quickly but intelligence lacked in reporting the true nature of the operation. In the same phone conversation on March 16th, Moorer assured Nixon that reports of ARVN soldiers fleeing simply was not true, although, later studies and focus of the ARVN's exit strategy confirmed it was factual.<sup>177</sup>

By April, after the operation wrapped up completely, the administration struggled with the pros and cons they collected from the Laotian operation. For a president like Nixon, who's track record illustrated by both his own admission and the staff who worked for him, struggled with defeat, negative feedback or any personal criticism. It was difficult to tell if the positive assessment of Lam Son came from an honest reflection of the operation or just his way of reassuring himself he had not made a mistake. On March 18th, speaking candidly with Kissinger, Nixon gloated about the upper hand he gained with the North Vietnamese after Lam Son: "I just know that going in there and knocking the livin' bejeezus out of those in Laos – and it scared 'em."<sup>178</sup> A few days later, on March 21st, a phone conversation between Kissinger and Laird revealed the two men placating each other on the Lam Son operation; Kissinger asked, "– that the operation has been considered a success?" Laird responded, "Oh, yeah." With Henry pressing

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and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) (Washington DC: March 16, 1971, 8:58am), Document 152.

<sup>177</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) (Washington DC: March 16, 1971, 8:58am), Document 152.*

<sup>178</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman) (Washington DC: March 18, 1971), Document 157.*

again, “Don’t you think?” to receive from Laird “Right; it has been a success.”<sup>179</sup> However, just shy of a month later, on April 21st, Nixon told Kissinger, “The Laotian gamble cost us.”; the president acknowledged that many Americans felt as if the advance into Cambodia would be the last major military offensive before finishing the Vietnam War and pursuing Lam Son hit Nixon hard in the polls.<sup>180</sup> The backlash experienced by the administration during their excursion into Cambodia the year before was missing from their Laotian Operation; however, Americans expressed their disagreement with the president and his popularity plunged. In fact, the traditional peace movement made only the smallest peep in protest against Nixon’s move into Laos. Perhaps the most noteworthy act of dissidence was the Weathermen Collective placing a bomb within the Capitol building and wreaking a hefty amount of damage.<sup>181</sup> Demonstrations organized by veterans and traditional peace activists laid in wait but the immediate response appeared modest, at best.

The conversation after Lam Son regarding the drop in Nixon’s popularity and support in the the plummeting polls revealed the true threat that awaited Nixon as he advanced closer to an election year. Nixon told Kissinger, that in the face of a disappointing reaction on the home front after Lam Son, “we have to ruthlessly play for

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<sup>179</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of Defense Laird and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: March 21, 1971), Document 160.*

<sup>180</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 21, 1971), Document 188.*

<sup>181</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 478.

the best news that we can.”<sup>182</sup> Although historians and scholars missed candid conversations conducted in the comfort of the White House prior to 1971, Nixon’s tone changed as he acknowledged the shortcomings of his foreign policy decisions in Vietnam. Nixon no longer had the security of multiple years before he must face the reality of re-election. Decisions from 1971 and onward stuck in American minds, and reverberated within the voting booth. In comparison, Nixon and Kissinger ragged on radical motive in another private conversation with disdain; Kissinger told Nixon: “That’s what the radicals understand: they want to break the government... They don’t give a damn about Vietnam.”<sup>183</sup> These conversations happened two days apart but could not be more different in tone and attitude. As usual, the two men deplored the radicals for their perceived inappropriate behavior while considering the growing dissent of the average American’s thoughts regarding Vietnam represented in the downward tick of Nixon’s poll numbers.

Lastly, in regards to Lam Son 719, the justification that Nixon and Kissinger arrived at for conducting the operation was hard to prove in concrete evidence. With the bitter memories of the dry season DRV offensives through seasons past ingrained in the White House staff, the assumption that Hanoi was even planning a military offensive in 1971 is just that – an assumption. But this is not where the problem lies. CIA and other

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<sup>182</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 21, 1971), Document 188.*

<sup>183</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 23, 1971), Document 190.*

forms of U.S. intelligence, through estimation, confirmed that Lam Son worked just enough to make it near impossible for the DRV to successfully recover and launch threatening military plans within South Vietnam or neighboring Laos, if in fact, that was their original plan. In a memorandum to the president, Kissinger included MACV's final report on Lam Son, concluding "Although it is too early to make a final judgment, Lam Son 719 may well prove to have been a pivotal point in the Indochina conflict."<sup>184</sup> This was just one example, among several, that illustrated the narrative of depleted enemy sanctuaries and massive disruption along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, demolishing supplies and future manpower. For Nixon and Kissinger to settle on this conclusion, with spotty support by current intelligence, their next leap that Lam Son ensured a later start to the DRV's 1972 offensive was completely unfounded. In Kissinger's memoir he reiterated this theory that both the Cambodian incursion in 1970 and the Laotian Operation in 1971 postponed the enemy's advance in 1972: "The campaigns of 1970 and 1971, in my view, saved us in 1972."<sup>185</sup> However, the administration had little evidence to whether or not Hanoi would even launch an offensive in 1972, and if they were, on what timetable this would occur. Declassified documents do not share any knowledge of Hanoi's plans leading up to 1972. An educated guess was based on their past decisions but because it varied in 1972 does not soundly credit the success of Lam Son. If Lam Son dealt such a damaging blow and depleted DRV's resources to eliminate their ability to launch an offensive, Hanoi may have arrived in Paris far more eager to find a settlement.

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<sup>184</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 16, 1971), Document 182.*

<sup>185</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1009.

Overall, Lam Son 719 created a little wiggle room for policy makers as they continued to push for pacification, Vietnamization and explore negotiations. It was hastily put together and fell short of the expectations that Nixon anticipated in January. It exposed the weaknesses among ARVN troops and the successes that U.S. officials lauded were not permanent accomplishments. Nixon argued in his memoirs that U.S. airpower was horrible, laying blame on their incompetence to South Vietnamese failure.<sup>186</sup> But as withdrawals continued, there would not be U.S. air support on the next military campaign to tip the scales. The ARVN needed to succeed on their own abilities to prove that Vietnamization was working at full capacity to beat back an aggressive enemy and keep the Thieu regime propped up though difficult enemy onslaughts.

But as Lam Son dissatisfied on the battlefield, it created enough of a headache for the administration on the domestic front as more Americans were growing weary of the war and beginning to turn on the president's policies. The aftermath of Lam Son within the United States was not simple. As the weather began to thaw into spring, demonstrations were planned to challenge another year of military engagement in Indochina. Unlike demonstrations staged in Washington in years past, the growing veteran's movement organized a threatening week long rally that impacted the direction of the anti war movement unlike any public protest to date. Before the Vietnam vets descended on Washington, in another strategic move to curtail the peace movement and prove the war was nearing its end, Nixon announced on April 9th another round of

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<sup>186</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 498.

withdrawals amounting to 100,000-104,000 through December 31, 1971.<sup>187</sup> The defeat of Lam Son forced Nixon's hand as "Nixon intended the address to quell congressional and press attacks against his administration that had in crewed in the wake of the Laos Operation."<sup>188</sup> With both the VVAW and the May Day demonstrations looming in the near future, Nixon's announcement easily countered the argument that the protesters were planning at the end of April. He was continuing to remove troops from Vietnam, despite Lam Son, and fulfilling his promise of winding down the war.

The VVAW organized and prepared for their first major, week long demonstration, titled Dewey Canyon III, playing off of two previous U.S. operations in Indochina given the same name. The week of April 19 was jammed packed with various activities, organized by the VVAW, designed for veterans to publically bring their grievances to Congress, the Supreme Court and the White House. They sacrificed their lives, limbs and mental health in Vietnam and many veterans felt entitled to protest post-war; their goal was demanding immediate and total withdrawal of American fighting forces from Indochina to prevent the death of more American soldiers while bringing attention to veterans problems – dangerously inefficient VA hospitals, drug addiction among returning vets and high unemployment for Vietnam veterans specifically – that remained prevalent and were ignored by both the government and popular media.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Backchannel Message from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) (Washington DC: March 27, 1971), Document 170.*

<sup>188</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Editorial Note (April 7, 1971), Document 174.*

<sup>189</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 86-102.

Almost a year after the Cambodian invasion and the killings at Kent State, the VVAW grew financially with recognition and members. Press coverage leading up to Dewey Canyon differed dramatically from the Winter Soldier Investigation and Operation RAW; their press coup on March 16 and continued media attention up until the week of the demonstration provided public exposure that the VVAW leadership had never experienced before.<sup>190</sup> However, as the vets prepared for travel to the country's capital, they ran into one major hiccup more troubling than any other; a permit to camp on the mall in Washington was withheld, leaving them no where to legally stay during the week of Dewey Canyon.<sup>191</sup> Lacking a permit failed to dissuade the vets from participating in the demonstration but it became such a hot topic issue throughout the week that it directly impacted their influence with Richard Nixon himself.

The Nixon Administration faced new obstacles with the budding branch of the peace movement. It was easy to discredit the majority of the anti war movement as unwashed, radical, dangerous hippies attempting to invoke anarchy in the streets of America, but it was impossible to discredit the people who were shipped off to fight the very war Nixon was waging to win.<sup>192</sup> Especially with the veteran activists that arrived in Washington as two thirds of the Dewey Canyon demonstrators had enlisted rather than forced into the conflict by the draft.<sup>193</sup> These were not men who unwillingly fought in

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<sup>190</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 103.

<sup>191</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 105.

<sup>192</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 77.

<sup>193</sup> Hamid Mowlana and Paul H. Geftert, "Vietnam Veterans against the War: A Profile Study of the Dissenters," in *The New Soldier*, (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 52.

Vietnam due to their draft number being called. Most of the men identified as politically conservative before their tour with positive or indifferent feelings towards the conflict in Vietnam who then enlisted to fight for their country.<sup>194</sup> These are the same men that Nixon celebrated while bashing radical protesters. It would be in bad taste and difficult to spin their honor, duty and sacrifice to score political points without destroying Nixon's image while doing it. But, the threat went deeper than branding issues. Nixon was careful and masterful in what information was released to the media and the American people. Before June's publication of the Pentagon Papers, many Americans still wholeheartedly believed what their government told them. Veterans challenged this status quo. Simple fabrications like twisting military operations as positive rather than negative or claiming American troops were not present in certain zones was easily challenged by veterans who returned describing a different reality. And that's exactly what Dewey Canyon revealed to both Congress and the Americans who followed it on the nightly news. Few declassified documents or diary entries revealed any general planning leading up to the VVAW demonstration. With the radical factions of the anti war protesters hot on the heels of Dewey Canyon, it was likely the administration responded to the veterans as they had with the young dissidence. Nixon's reaction to the veterans protesting changed as the week progressed but before Monday, when the veterans launched their domestic offensive, it was business as usual.

Monday, April 19th kicked off the demonstration festivities with a march to Arlington Cemetery where gates were slammed in the faces of the disabled veterans and the Gold Star mothers who accompanied them, prohibiting them from laying two wreaths

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<sup>194</sup> Mowlana and Geftert. "Vietnam Veterans against the War," 52.



in honor of both American and Vietnamese combat deaths.<sup>195</sup> Despite the veteran's obvious frustration, they continued their march through the mall and soon rejoiced in the news that the Washington District Court of Appeals lifted its injunction on restricting the vets from camping on the mall, which the Nixon Administration enforced as the veterans set up camp the previous evening.<sup>196</sup> The week progressed with groups of vets participating in various activities they believed influential in changing policy-maker's minds regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Similar to other high profile organizations that flourished before them, SDS for example, the VVAW struggled with deep divisions, political allegiance, and what direction the organization should take derail the White House's current foreign policy. This division started from the top, with leaders John Kerry and Al Hubbard, and remained present throughout the ranks of veterans. Kerry believed entirely in cooperative, non-violent, obedient protest and finding change within the current system while Al Hubbard, a black veteran, in favor of shaking up their dissidence with civil disobedience to overhaul the system he viewed as broken and oppressive.<sup>197</sup> Naturally, the group differed on what actions would take place during the week in Washington, separating those who practiced in radical acts of civil disobedience as "the crazies."<sup>198</sup> Their focus throughout the week was participating in guerilla theater near the Capitol building with painted faces or on Thursday, April 22nd, a day hiatus from demonstrations, the crazies marched a group of vets down to the Supreme Court,

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<sup>195</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 109.

<sup>196</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 116.

<sup>197</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 112-114.

<sup>198</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 117-118.

where after causing only a slight disruption, refused to move when police requested that they did, and the group ended up politely arrested.<sup>199</sup> Compared to their anti-war counterparts, especially extremist group the Weathermen, the radical actions of the crazies within the VVAW were fairly tame.

Perhaps the two largest events, and the most commonly acknowledged, that came from the Dewey Canyon III demonstration was John Kerry's address in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the overwhelming display of veterans lining up to throw their medals earned in Vietnam over the fence erected in front of the Capitol. On the last day dedicated to Dewey Canyon III, Friday, April 23rd, more than 800 veterans participated<sup>200</sup> in returning their honors and medals back to the government who originally committed them to Indochina. Iconic images of long haired, fatigue clad veterans, some in wheelchairs, others with missing limbs, took turns either quietly throwing their honors over the fence or publicly denouncing U.S. Vietnam policy, often time accompanied with passionate emotion. The overall impact of the event was profound. These veterans, most who had enlisted in the military as a sense of patriotic duty, gave back the awards that the government had bestowed upon them against violence, the loss of friends and the risk of their own, personal injury. This statement – the accomplishments and honors of the federal government were useless or immoral in light of the inhumanity of the Vietnam War – became clear through veteran's tears and the littered steps of the Capitol that Friday. The returning of the medals, coupled with Thursday's hearing in front of the Foreign Relations Committee, propelled the veterans

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<sup>199</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 134-135.

<sup>200</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 140-141.

into a whole new realm of sway and impact within the peace movement and on the Nixon Administration.

John Kerry by April 1971 was the bright beacon of the VVAW. He found himself testifying to the U.S atrocities committed in Vietnam in front of the Senate after he impressed Senator Fulbright at a pro-VVAW dinner a few nights before on April 20th.<sup>201</sup> Kerry's testimony was an incredible opportunity for the organization for several reasons. First, they were finally able to air their concerns in front of Congress, willing to listen with an open mind. After being snubbed, ignored and cast aside up until the hearing by numerous congressmen, even those who expressed opposition to the war,<sup>202</sup> the veterans were taken seriously enough to expose their best asset, an articulate John Kerry, to a room full of powerful ears. Second, the statement reached a far wider audience who had not discovered the new branch of the peace movement yet. Walter Cronkite dedicated several evenings to the VVAW Washington protests<sup>203</sup> but a clean cut, well-spoken, respectable veteran like Kerry would turn heads to the anti war cause. Kerry's testimony was powerful. He exposed subjects only the VVAW had expressed concern for up until that point: war atrocities, unemployment, poorly ran VAs, and the moral corruption of the administrations that dedicated American lives to the conflict in Indochina. He held accountable Nixon's predecessors and their wrongdoing in Vietnam but reminded the Senate that President Nixon was to blame for the continuation of the war. Kerry stated:

“Finally, this administration has done us the ultimate dishonor. They have attempted to disown us and the sacrifices we made for this country. In their

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<sup>201</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 124.

<sup>202</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 112-114.

<sup>203</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 116.

blindness and fear they have tried to deny that we are veterans or that we served in Nam. We do not need their testimony. Our own scars and stumps of limbs are witness enough for others and for ourselves.”<sup>204</sup>

The speech was artful, well crafted and influential. The veterans, with Kerry as their mouthpiece, reiterated what the youth-led peace movement had screamed for years. With their experience, duty and sacrifice, the veterans established a relationship with Congress who could pull the rug from underneath Nixon’s foreign policy. The elite of Washington politics could no longer deny the veteran-led movement as Kerry and his colleagues implanted the immorality of the war in the minds that the traditional anti war movement were unable to penetrate.

Nixon knew the ramifications of the week, especially after the media helped propel images of Kerry and vets chucking purple hearts back to the feet of the federal government. Nixon employed his same tactics with the veterans as he relied on with the youthful dissidence. During the demonstration he ramped up FBI surveillance of the veterans and unleashed undercover agents to penetrate the VVAW to either gather intelligence or instigate illegal behavior among vulnerable activists.<sup>205</sup> Nixon attempted to discredit the veterans by taking away the one piece of protection they cherished and other anti war activists lacked: their service and status. Nixon leaked that over half of the veterans participating in Dewey Canyon were imposters, lying about their service record and were not active members of the military.<sup>206</sup> The tactic made sense. If Nixon could not

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<sup>204</sup> John Kerry and the Vietnam Veterans against the War, *The New Soldier* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 13.

<sup>205</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 102-103.

<sup>206</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 119.

neutralize the veterans like the other factions of the peace movement, he simply had to remove their status as a veteran and expose their lying motives as far more disgusting than the long-haired radicals protesting in the streets. Lastly, Nixon rallied pro-Vietnam veteran groups like the Veterans of Foreign Affairs, with equal media time as the VVAW, in defense of the administration's policy in Indochina.<sup>207</sup> If he was unable to establish doubt among Americans with the veteran's credentials, his next move was to gather pro-war veterans to vouch for his decisions and rally support for Nixon's foreign policy in Indochina.

Two important elements of the demonstration revealed how far Nixon went to overpower the veteran's influence but congruently, revealing how much power the veterans held when openly defying the federal government. Nixon decided to take on the veterans by ensuring they were unable to legally camp on the mall for the duration of the protest. As the decision went back and forth in the Supreme Court, on Wednesday, April 21st, the court ruled against the veterans saying they could stay during the day on the mall but could not sleep there.<sup>208</sup> In a decisive moment for the VVAW, plagued with differing opinions in whether to defy or obey the court's decision, the veterans voted; their act of democracy resulted in a ruling of 480-400 for sleeping on the mall, fully prepared for the arrest they assumed would follow.<sup>209</sup> However, no arrests followed. Nixon's speech writer, Pat Buchanan, claimed Nixon was the "driving force" behind

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<sup>207</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 336.

<sup>208</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 130.

<sup>209</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 130-132.

restricting the police from pursuing arrests on the mall.<sup>210</sup> Haldeman supported

Buchanan's claim; on Thursday, April 22nd, Haldeman wrote:

“We had a long session this morning to try to determine what to do in the face of the fact that the veterans are in violation of the Supreme Court order by staying on the mall, and it's really our job to enforce that order but the p [President Nixon] has ordered the Attorney General not to use police and not to evict the veterans.”<sup>211</sup>

He continued expressing that only one more night remained of the demonstration and it was not worth pursuing.<sup>212</sup> Nixon, now several years into his presidency, grew accustomed to making decisions in the face of domestic protest. He was aware of the backlash that his administration would feel, both from Congress, the media and possibly the American people at the voting booths a year later if he unleashed police officer on disabled American patriots, dragging them off of the national mall. He knew it was a battle that was not worth fighting as the consequences would be too extreme for the administration, not for the VVAW. This, among many throughout the week, was a clear victory for the VVAW and the peace movement as a whole. For the president, who privately expressed blasting away the DRV and resorting to military bombardment on a whim of constant frustration, it could not be easy to roll over and let a group of activists break the law without reprimanding them. The forgotten soldiers of an unpopular war returned home with the upper hand over the same government that banished them to the jungles of Southeast Asia.

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<sup>210</sup> Buchanan, *Nixon's White House Years*, 209.

<sup>211</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 336.

<sup>212</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 336.

Dewey Canyon was not a one-week charge that was easily forgotten after the veterans packed up and went home. Their impact reverberated through the Nixon Administration as they now faced growing resistance among congressmen and now the real possibility that Dewey Canyon influenced the North Vietnamese. A conversation between Nixon and Kissinger on April 26th portray a president raw with emotion only days after the demonstration ended. Nixon told Kissinger, after expressing yet another desire for a military move, “Why think, when I don’t think you need to think about it? My point is, you’ve got to show them right after these demonstrations, that we’re not going to be affected by them.”<sup>213</sup> Knowing the veterans had created sway among more groups than the marginalized anti war activists, he was quick to consider military aggression to prove to the North Vietnamese that the vets lacked real power at persuading Nixon’s foreign policy. However, the power of the veterans could persuade the POW wives to apply more pressure on Nixon for a settlement and the release of their loved ones. This created a major political headache for Nixon and Kissinger. The two profited politically on the POW issue and needed the support of the wives. Nixon referred to them as their “Achilles heel” and told Kissinger, “If those POW wives start running around, coming on to this general election, the veterans, you’re in real – we are in trouble like you wouldn’t - ”<sup>214</sup> The turning of the POW wives could harm his policies in Vietnam and cripple his chances at securing the presidency for the following year. On the last day

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<sup>213</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (April 26, 1971), Document 191.*

<sup>214</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (April 26, 1971), Document 191.*

of the demonstrations, Bob Haldeman wrote in his diary that he believed the power of the VVAW's activism throughout the week contributed to the three-point decrease in Nixon's poll ratings and continued to the growing sentiment among voters that the Nixon Administration was handling the whole Vietnam affair wrong.<sup>215</sup> Dewey Canyon III was more than a speed bump demonstration that required a week of press dismissing the reckless hippies. The veterans changed the game.

The VVAW protest was the pivotal point for the organization with Dewey Canyon being the highest profile event the veterans embarked on. The media, who ignored previous actions of the VVAW, granted enough coverage of the veterans, alarming the Nixon Administration. Unlike the youth-led demonstrations, who believed the media was just as much against them as they were in disagreement with the White House, newspaper and recorded press often spoke poorly of their actions and attempts to end the war in Vietnam. The veterans kept streets open, did not participate in vandalism and avoided violent confrontations with police forces. Despite several acts of the crazies, their biggest display of civil disobedience was refusing to leave the mall when instructed not to sleep there. It was an easy element to overlook as the veterans sacrificed their lives, limbs and friends to defend their country. The mentality was if the long-haired peaceniks were granted access to various pieces of Washington real estate to demonstrate, why not the veterans? For the first time, the front line came home to share their experiences and shed a light on the untruths the American government within the last six years spread with ease. The medals and awards that garnished their uniforms provided them enough credibility to create pause for many Americans who, reflected through polls and

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<sup>215</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 337.



questionnaires, now felt the support they offered their country was quickly waning. The veterans broke through a stalemate that plagued the traditional peace movement since the ousting of Johnson. They provided a justification for Americans who struggled with supporting their soldiers, military and government, regardless of the morality of the conflict, to doubt the policy choices of the current administration that broke its promise of rapid disengagement in Indochina.

The veterans were not the only activists to descend on Washington in the spring of 1971. On April 24th, a day after the veterans had completed Dewey Canyon, 250,000-500,000 people marched peacefully in the streets of Washington resulting in mostly positive media coverage.<sup>216</sup> April 25th-27th came another round of calm demonstrations with the only act of civil disobedience being the disruption of government buildings following in numerous, but few, arrests.<sup>217</sup> However, the government was most prepared for protests during the beginning of May. Rennie Davis and his band of merry radical activists, along with the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) and the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice (PCPJ), were determined to make a bigger statement than marching up and down Washington; they hoped to create such chaos in the streets that they would prohibit federal employees from entering the city and in effect, shutdown the government for the day.<sup>218</sup>

Nixon and his men knew they needed a readied response if the activists rallied enough people to shut down roadways leading in and out of the capital. On May 3rd,

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<sup>216</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 496-498.

<sup>217</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 499-500.

<sup>218</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 471-489.

before the young men and women embarked on their quest of shutting down the government, the police quickly, violently, and wrongfully arrested over 7,000 protesters; the sheer violence inflicted on many Americans, some innocent bystanders, impacted not only powerful members of the movement like Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky and Daniel Ellsberg, but rattled high-ranking officials of the administration including Ron Ziegler and Ray Price who described the round-up as “ugly.”<sup>219</sup> Haldeman reported more arrests, up to 8,000, in his personal diaries; the protesters were detained in Washington’s football stadium with Nixon expressing he felt it may be better to have them out, clogging up streets and further tainting the anti war movement rather than locked away.<sup>220</sup> Allowing the protesters to roam free would have another benefit for the administration; it saved them a PR nightmare. With thousands of young Americans, most illegally arrested, exposed to the elements, John Ehrlichman noted the whole affair was handled badly with the stadium resembling a concentration camp.<sup>221</sup> A few days later, Nixon and his men discussed the handling of the arrests, reviewed the procedures in place but ultimately, perceived they escaped public backlash and public opinion firmly on their side.<sup>222</sup>

For the anti war movement, the conclusions gathered from the spring marches were mixed. For some activists, they agreed with the administration’s assessment of their efforts; they had failed to successfully shut down the government for a day and their inefficiencies to stay one step ahead of the administration bolstered the White House’s

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<sup>219</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 500-503.

<sup>220</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 344.

<sup>221</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 504-505.

<sup>222</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 344.

ongoing position against the movement.<sup>223</sup> Others countered that the ultimate goal was not to actually shut down the government but issue a statement, which they accomplished; on a smaller scale the demonstration, running together with the VVAW's week of protests, reminded both Americans and the government that further prolonging of the war would result in more domestic upheaval.<sup>224</sup> Between the near three weeks of constant protest on the capital, from veterans to disgruntled citizens to radicals, the peace movement reminded the president that they remained a domestic threat. Their message transcended the U.S. government and continued to aid the North Vietnamese as they met privately with Kissinger. The spring domestic unrest had changed from years past. Although the movement still encompassed members from the mid-1960s, the entrance of once pro-war veterans, disillusioned and inspired to act, applied more pressure on elected officials throughout the government. Despite failures, miscalculations and missed achievements, the anti war movement, with veterans and youth alike, considered their spring activism as a success. They put the administration on their heels and influenced one individual to finally move in a different direction, completely shattering the illusions and misinformation believed in how the U.S. had committed its resources and manpower to Vietnam.

Daniel Ellsberg, like many veterans who returned to participate in Dewey Canyon, was not born politically radical. He graduated from Harvard, determined to study and prevent the use of nuclear weapons after bombs were used in Japan during

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<sup>223</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 505.

<sup>224</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 512.

World War II.<sup>225</sup> He a Marine that spent two years in Vietnam in 1964 upon McNamara's request. Upon his return home to work at the RAND corporation, he quickly concluded, based on his experience in Vietnam that the war was unwinnable and immoral.<sup>226</sup> The RAND corporation, a research institute connected with the Defense Department, worked exclusively, with Ellsberg and other analysts, on the Pentagon Papers.<sup>227</sup> The Pentagon Papers was a classified study of the circumstances that entrenched the American military in Vietnam from as early as Eisenhower's presidency in the early to mid 1950s, conducted by Johnson's Secretary of State Robert McNamara. The final results countered the United State's public position that current strategy, or any other U.S. strategy, would deliver U.S. defeat in Vietnam.<sup>228</sup> Ellsberg grew up believing in the United States, like so many people emerging in the Post-WWII era, and his early work with the government, researching and understanding the threat of nuclear war, was motivated by patriotism and what he perceived as doing the right thing by his country.<sup>229</sup> However, exposure to the totality of the war, not deluded by politicians with personal agendas who manipulated or lied about information regarding Vietnam, Ellsberg quickly concluded that the war could

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<sup>225</sup> Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 24-37.

<sup>226</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets*, 199-214.

<sup>227</sup> Tzach Yoked, "The Real Person behind 'The Post': An Interview with the Leaker That Nixon Hunted." *haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-person-behind-the-post-an-interview-with-the-leaker-nixon-hunted-1.5730488> (accessed October 28, 2018).

<sup>228</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets*, 198-214.

<sup>229</sup> Daniel Ellsberg, "Daniel Ellsberg Explains Why He Leaked the Pentagon Papers." Interview by Dave Davies. NPR's Fresh Air, December 4, 2017.

never be won and the American people were ignorant of influential facts on the commitment of U.S. forces to Indochina by their government.<sup>230</sup> Risking his freedom, fully understanding that his actions would result in prison time, he embarked on the painstaking task of Xeroxing the hundreds of stolen pages of the Pentagon Papers<sup>231</sup> and eventually gave them to the *New York Times* for publication; the classified document hit newsstands June 13, 1971.<sup>232</sup> The conclusion of the study was pretty clear: regardless of whatever tactics the U.S. took in Vietnam, the war was unwinnable. The publication was huge for the anti war movement, who argued this exact point for years prior, and debunked hawkish theories, including Nixon's own thoughts, that if the bombing halt in 1968 had been avoided, the U.S. would have walked away victorious.

The Nixon Administration wasted no time in responding to the publication of the Pentagon Papers. The study itself spared Nixon the embarrassment and calamity of covering his own actions; the documents lambasted his liberal predecessors and their missteps in committing American ground troops to Vietnam. However, ignoring the publication of the papers provided several problems for the administration. First, it set a standard that leaking classified documents was acceptable if the White House refused to act; especially documents that lacked review by the current administration that could threaten active military operations in Indochina.<sup>233</sup> For Nixon, the leak threatened his stability among his most vocal opponents about his foreign policy: "Critics of the war

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<sup>230</sup> Ellsberg, "Daniel Ellsberg Explains."

<sup>231</sup> Ellsberg, "Daniel Ellsberg Explains."

<sup>232</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 508.

<sup>233</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 364.

would use them to attack my goals and my policies.”<sup>234</sup> For Kissinger, it was personal. Ellsberg and Kissinger’s relationship dated back to their time at Harvard and for the National Security Advisor, the treasonous act by Ellsberg could pulled his credibility down with the president; Kissinger raged with accusations against Ellsberg of sexual perversion and mental instability.<sup>235</sup> Another problem for the administration was the media’s complicity in treasonous actions. For Nixon, it was more evidence the press was hell bent on destroying his credibility and his policies. Punishment was crucial for their perceived illegal participation with the publication of the Pentagon Papers. Lastly, the publication fueled the peace movement who were actively applying pressure on Congress and the Senate. On June 22nd, nine days after the documents became public, the Mansfield resolution – requiring American forces to leave Indochina within nine months after U.S. POWs were released – passed 57-42.<sup>236</sup> Congress finally awakened after Cambodia and Kent State and now their efforts in the wake of Dewey Canyon and the Pentagon Papers became reality. Activists, especially the student-led SDS and other resistors, claimed the war was immoral and unwinnable from the beginning. The findings within the classified documents supported their original outrage. With the publication of the classified study, it became increasingly difficult for Nixon to justify the continuation of military escalation for victory or an honorable peace when there was never an honorable exit originally.

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<sup>234</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 509.

<sup>235</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*.

<sup>236</sup> Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 257.

The chaos that followed the release of the Pentagon Papers shaped history in ways the peace movement and the Nixon Administration never expected. In short, the administration turned to the courts to obstruct the *New York Times* or any other national newspaper from publishing the remaining documents; the Supreme Court sided against the president and several other sources, the Washington Post biggest in status and name, picked up where the *New York Times* left off.<sup>237</sup> Nixon, clearly not soft on any individual aiding the peace movement, felt it crucial to hit Ellsberg hard as a repercussion for his treachery; disgracing Ellsberg linked his actions to both the media and the liberals causing negative backlash for the administration.<sup>238</sup> Nixon, however, manipulated the Pentagon Papers to benefit his own political agenda. With the elections rapidly approaching, he used the subject of the documents – former liberal policy makers – as the foundation of his PR smear job against his future political opponents and was determined to reveal as much wrongdoing by presidents Kennedy and Johnson in the commitment of political, advisory and eventually, ground troops to Vietnam.<sup>239</sup> He also countered the release by encouraging the declassification of more documents to appear transparent and convey to the public that regardless of what his liberal predecessors did, he was not actively suppressing any information to misguide the nation.<sup>240</sup> But his biggest move relied heavily on prosecuting Ellsberg. So needless to say, and not out of character of Richard Nixon, the president moved quickly to destroy Daniel Ellsberg.

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<sup>237</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 378.

<sup>238</sup> Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 255.

<sup>239</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 383.

<sup>240</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 365.

Resorting to the typical tactics that remained familiar in politics during the 1960s and 70s, especially pertaining to the members of the peace movement, Nixon used dubious and questionable resources, quelling further release of declassified documents that aided his critics. However, a conspiracy was born after June 13th; Nixon believed the study commissioned by McNamara was one of many that Ellsberg and his radical co-conspirators at various research institutes throughout the country attempted to publicize.<sup>241</sup> Paranoia and the impact of the peace movement's power seized the president's wiser judgment. The argument that Ellsberg and other individuals sympathetic to the anti war movement's cause possessed more documents and may want to release them was not outrageous. It was completely logical the president may have jumped to that conclusion. However, the evidence was missing to justify Nixon's next action. A group of thuggish, hardened CIA operatives – several who dated back to the Bay of Pigs – formed to address and eliminate leaks coming from the White House; leaders of the group – Hunt, Liddy and Young<sup>242</sup> – became famous years later with their involvement in the Watergate scandal. The group – nicknamed “the plumbers” – a fact that Nixon denied knowing until years later when he was under federal investigation during the Watergate controversy<sup>243</sup>, illegally broke into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office to obtain damaging information on his mental state to disrepute Ellsberg and his decision to leak the Pentagon Papers.<sup>244</sup> This was the beginning of the end for Nixon, although, at

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<sup>241</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 512-514.

<sup>242</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 514.

<sup>243</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 514.

<sup>244</sup> Hayden, *The Long Sixties*, 78.



this junction he was unaware of how his actions would return to dismantle his presidency and reputation.

The peace movement claimed their victory, especially activist veteran Tom Hayden, with the unraveling of Richard Nixon and the finality of the Vietnam War, claiming the pressure of the anti war movement caused Nixon's eventual downfall with the authorization of the Plumbers against Ellsberg.<sup>245</sup> This statement was convoluted and difficult to unpack, but there lay some truth in the credit awarded to the anti war movement after the publication of the Pentagon Papers. First, the movement, especially draft dodgers, radicalized Ellsberg to risk his personal freedom to steal the documents and then release them to the public. Ellsberg credited the bravery of draft resisters and activists to finalize his decision:

“Without young men going to prison for nonviolent protests against the draft, men I met on their way to prison, no Pentagon Papers. It wouldn't have occurred to me simply to do something that would put myself in prison for the rest of my life, as I assumed that would do. So, obviously, that was not an obvious decision to make, except once I'd seen the example of people like Randy Kehler and Bob Eaton and others and David Harris, who did go to prison to say that the war was wrong – the Vietnam War was wrong – and that they refused to participate in it.”<sup>246</sup>

Unknown men and women, and well-recognized drafter resisters, influenced the man behind the Pentagon Papers. This was the movement's first major victory after the publication of the Vietnam study. The constant struggle of winning over new members and turning people off by their actions had resulted in persuading one individual to take his misgivings on the war and share them with the nation, despite the legal ramifications that would likely follow. The second credited victory coming from the publication were

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<sup>245</sup> Hayden, *The Long Sixties*, 78.

<sup>246</sup> Ellsberg, “Daniel Ellsberg Explains.”

government secrets exposed to the American people on two fronts: the exposure of the American government's wrongdoing and using their own words to empower the anti war cause. Youthful activists, calling their government out for lying, manipulation and immorality could now point to concrete facts to support their claims. The Pentagon Papers proved the government had deceived the American people, from the beginning, with their handling of the Vietnam War. And not only had the government mislead them, regardless of what the current administration promised as they dropped bombs and enforced cross-border operations, no amount of military aggression would secure a victory in Indochina. Lastly, referring back to Hayden's assessment of the peace movement and its accomplishments, Nixon concluded, based on his paranoia and instability regarding the capabilities of the anti war movement, that crafting a team of men to execute illegal operations to curb further exposure to leaks and criticism of his administration's actions in Indochina was a sound decision. The plumbers were the same group that later broke into the Democratic Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel, kick starting the demise of the president after his landslide election in 1972. To give credit to the peace movement for the finality of the Vietnam War was not completely speculative. To apply "what if" history to calculate that Nixon would have continued committing U.S. resources and residual forces to Vietnam long after the ground troops returned is unknowable as the president was impeached before the end of his term. Nixon's private motivation indicated funding and indirect U.S. involvement in Vietnam would continue until 1976. However, because the term was incomplete, his removal concluded the Vietnam War before outside forces, such as pressure from Congress, could have accomplished the same result while Nixon still occupied the White House. The pressure

from the peace movement and the results stemming from the publication of the Pentagon Papers forced Nixon to act irrationally and his ventures ignited the beginning of the president's undoing.

The remainder of 1971 was fairly uneventful in respects to the anti war movement or their ability to fashion a large statement to muster more American attention. They still remained active and students, various peace organizations and the veterans continued to participate in acts of resistance but their inspired demonstrations from the spring was the high mark of the year. In the fall of 1971, as students returned to their college campuses for another school year, the PCPJ and NPAC attempted to organize another round of protests in October and November but they fell short; turn out was weak for the "Evict Nixon" protest at the end of October, hosted by Rennie Davis, who backed away from his desired goal of shutting down the government, again, and "as the White House anticipated, the fall demonstrations were generally unimpressive."<sup>247</sup> This was supported by the lack of acknowledgement in Haldeman's diary, who up until this point during the presidency, made some comment on the peace movement's demonstrations, regardless of how unimpressive they may have been.

The VVAW was active, but much like their youthful brethren, it was small scale in comparison to their activism at the end of April. VVAW's own publication "The Veteran" or during the summer of 1971 the magazine was titled "The 1st Casualty," documented the organization's fall activities ranging from VVAW solo sponsored events to demonstrations that encompassed the whole movement.<sup>248</sup> Although, they had one

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<sup>247</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 523-528.

<sup>248</sup> VVAW. "Fall Antiwar Activities." *The 1<sup>st</sup> Casualty*, August, 1971.

more act of resistance that made headlines and concerned the White House right before the New Year. In the final weeks of December, the veterans, responding to Nixon's decision to ramp up the bombing of North Vietnam, occupied the Statue of Liberty for two days before they retreated with no charges or arrests.<sup>249</sup> The White House, not the least bit fazed by the activists a few months prior, felt it necessary to take a stand against the veterans who were gaining solid media attention. Ehrlichman requested the park police to dismantle the protest and remove the veterans. However, the court denied an injunction by the federal government, protecting the Vietnam vets and leaving the White House unable to handle the protest their way.<sup>250</sup> Ultimately, the entirety of the peace movement achieved little to threaten the Nixon Administration compared to the spring mobilization. This lack of action does not discredit their year; 1971 was a powerful answer and restraint to a president, who despite showing signs of finishing the war, was still resorting to avenues of military aggression.

For Nixon and the White House, the year was shaping up to have major highlights and low points. Outside of Indochina, Henry Kissinger embarked on a secret meeting with the Chinese to pave the way for a groundbreaking summit the following year with President Nixon. However, the pesky problem of the Vietnam War still loomed over the policy-makers' heads. Kissinger continued to covertly travel to Paris to make contact with the North Vietnamese in attempts to find a settlement on the war. By August 16th, Kissinger had engaged in five previous meetings with Hanoi without finding a

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<sup>249</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 531-532.

<sup>250</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 472.

satisfactory conclusion.<sup>251</sup> However, Kissinger was optimistic after every conference, despite various setbacks that threatened to derail future negotiations. In a perceived political play, on July 1st, Mme. Binh published their “Seven Points” that required agreement by the U.S. to accomplish a final settlement; Kissinger, outraged, felt the “Seven Points” mirrored what he had been discussing secretly in Paris but different enough to blindside the administration.<sup>252</sup> Kissinger expressed in his memoirs that going public with Binh’s “Seven Points” and an article published by the U.S. media, interviewing Lu Duc Tho, was a savvy propaganda move by the North Vietnamese; because the Paris meetings were conducted secretly, no American knew to what extent the administration was attempting to find peace and with Hanoi going public, it appeared as if they were compromising while the U.S. was doing nothing.<sup>253</sup> Regardless, Kissinger continued to meet with the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris throughout the summer and early fall. The two sides nearly reached a settlement by September, but stalled on a concession that neither side would approve; the North Vietnamese demanded the overthrow of the Thieu government while the U.S. swore to protect it.<sup>254</sup> It became clear

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<sup>251</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: August 16, 1971), Document 245.*

<sup>252</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum from W. Richard Smyser of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: July 1, 1971), Document 226.*

<sup>253</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1024-1025.

<sup>254</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum of Conversation (Paris: September 13, 1971, 11:25 am-1:30 pm), Document 254.*

by the final months of 1971 that Hanoi and the United States would not find an immediate conclusion to the war.

The fall of 1971 quickly moved into the winter of 1972 leaving little progression on a resolution for the White House in Indochina. In mid September, as negotiations stalled, Nixon jumped back to his most reliable threat: demanding military aggression toward the North Vietnamese. The madman theory re-emerged as Nixon expressed desire to bomb heavily over the DMZ and show Hanoi just what the president was capable of doing out of frustration and anger.<sup>255</sup> However, clearer minds like Bob Haldeman and Henry Kissinger reminded the president of the ramifications for military escalation. Kissinger told the president, “You know the domestic heat we’re going to take.”<sup>256</sup> Nixon quelled the argument by his justification, “And endangering – and endangering our forces as we withdrawal... I don’t think anybody’s going to complain about that.” To which Haldeman responded, “ – the people – the paper – the press will know it, but when they write it, it still comes out as – they think we’re bombing all the time there, anyways.”<sup>257</sup> The consequences of bombs dropping into North Vietnam were even higher as domestic stability and support was rapidly eroding. By the end of the year,

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<sup>255</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 432.

<sup>256</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and his Chief of Staff (Haldeman) (Washington DC: September 17, 1971), Document 256.*

<sup>257</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and his Chief of Staff (Haldeman) (Washington DC: September 17, 1971), Document 256.*

Kissinger knew they could not “weather another domestic storm before 1972”<sup>258</sup> and any foreign policy decision regarding Vietnam had to avoid provoking a vocal response from the peace movement. On November 12, 1971, Nixon announced yet another round of withdrawals – 45,000 troops by February, 1972 – while reassuring citizens who fled to Canada to avoid the draft would not receive amnesty.<sup>259</sup>

The peace movement had another year of recognizable achievements. Although policy makers completed another offensive across South Vietnamese borders in the first months of 1971, the stinging memory of Kent State and the Cambodian debacle on congressional members limited how the military conducted their operations by keeping U.S. support to a minimum and completely prohibiting U.S. manpower to cross over into Laos. The spring protests rattled the government, leaving a lasting impression as to the impact a bunch of rag tag veterans could make on most elements of American society – it’s people, the media and congressional leaders who were able to wield their power in favor of Nixon’s critics. Leaked documents cast greater doubt on the current administration as the American public learned that their government had lied to them when devoting their men to war. If the Gulf of Tonkin was fake and early policy makers had serious doubts about the chances of victory in the jungles of Southeast Asia, why press on and lose more men to bullets, bombs or POW camps? The movement rejoiced as more men returned home and their elected officials supported more legislation to halt Nixon’s foreign policy decisions in Indochina. As declassified documents and conversations revealed, any resolution the administration contemplated was followed by

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<sup>258</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1043.

<sup>259</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 454.

how the domestic critics would react. Their unwavering pressure restricted the president's abilities throughout Indochina pre-Nixon Administration. However, executive restrictions remained their biggest achievement. The war continued. Although Nixon had one hand tied behind his back, he still had enough power and determination to move forward with his policies. The overall goal of ending the war and ending all funding and fighting in Indochina was still left incomplete. The anti war presence was strong enough to keep the administration from dropping a nuclear bomb or investing American lives in cross-border operations but not powerful enough to force the president from packing up completely, sparing further American lives and leaving the South and North Vietnamese to conduct their disputes the way they felt appropriate.

As 1971 came to a close, the war in Vietnam, although shifted as more Americans returned to the states and bombing increased, remained unresolved. Nixon continued to support military operations spanning throughout Indochina as an appealing solution to keep the North Vietnamese at bay and buy more time for a satisfactory conclusion on the war. Lam Son 719 fell short of leader's expectations with ARVN forces unable to handle the demand without U.S. soldiers and advisors directly involved. The men in the White House experienced another year of domestic unrest that threatened their ability to finish the war on the terms that most benefited their agendas. The introduction of a well-organized group of Vietnam veterans established enough doubt in the minds of Americans and congressional members to apply more pressure on Nixon and Kissinger to finish the war as quickly as possible. Although youth-led organizations struggled to shed their reputations as chaos-inflicting radicals, their spring demonstrations kept the unpopular elements of the Vietnam War highlighted in the media and among the



American public who were increasingly growing tired of not only the conflict but the domestic divide. Nixon countered their outcries by announcing several large-scale troop withdrawals, undergoing secret talks with both the Chinese and Soviets in preparation of possible summits in 1972, and keeping the undercover channel open in Paris between Kissinger and Hanoi. With the election looming less than a year away, both the peace movement and the Nixon Administration geared up for a fight over Vietnam; the former hoping to topple Nixon electorally, like Johnson, and replace him with a pro-peace candidate while the latter crafted policy to protect not only his reputation among voters but exit Vietnam in a fashion that labeled himself victorious.

## Chapter VII.

### The Final Year of Seeking Peace, War, Re-election, and the Decent Interval Theory

The Nixon Administration had spent the last three years balancing the rigors of continuing an unpopular war with constant pressure from an effective and relentless anti war movement. As Nixon entered his final year of his first term as president, prepared to capture his party's bid in August and re-election in November, he was still bogged down in Indochina. Negotiations had proved fruitless and the stalemate between the United States and the North Vietnamese continued to harden as both sides refused to give into the political toppling of the Thieu government. The year of 1972 mirrored the years that had come before it: a spring offensive jolted the U.S. back into the role of military aggressor and the peace movement unleashed demonstrations, student strikes and desperate actions to curtail the administration's last attempt to save the Southern Vietnamese government from the Northern communists. However, the looming election awakened the distant memory of ousting LBJ while factions of the anti war movement, including the VVAW, ventured to Miami over the summer to disrupt the Republican Convention and imprint their dissidence on the millions of American watching from across the nation. The year of 1972 proved to be the final year that American combat troops humped the Indochina countryside. It would also be the year that Nixon's illegal tricks eroded his political future and permanently capitulated his foreign policy strategy in Vietnam.

January was a strong foreign policy month for the Nixon Administration. Despite stalling in the private peace talks in Paris with the North Vietnamese, the president handled little negative domestic reaction through the holiday season despite his decision to drop bombs over the DMZ into North Vietnam on December 27, 1971.<sup>260</sup> In January, to deflate an already quiet anti war movement, Nixon made two announcements that supported his past claims declaring himself a president determined to end the war in Vietnam. First, on January 13th, Nixon announced further withdrawals of 700,000 American troops by May 1st.<sup>261</sup> The second announcement, that came a few weeks later on January 25th, revealed the extent and content of the secret Paris peace talks between Henry Kissinger and Hanoi's communist delegation.<sup>262</sup>

These two announcements were directed specifically towards the domestic critics, in the form of activists, congressmen and media agents. Nixon recollected that an announcement to withdraw a large number of troops, especially in the face of a possible enemy offensive looming sometime within the few months that followed, "I felt that the numbers had to be significant in order to underscore the downward direction of my withdrawal policy."<sup>263</sup> Haldeman emphasized the president's point, although in much clearer terms, "This he figures will be a major blockbuster on the Vietnam thing and that it'll be especially effective because the first announcement will suck all the peaceniks out

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<sup>260</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: January 10, 1972), Document 288.*

<sup>261</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 477.

<sup>262</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 585.

<sup>263</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 584.

and the second move will chop them all off.”<sup>264</sup> The two proclamations were strategically organized to wound the peace movement as Nixon entered a re-election year. In a letter from Kissinger to Ambassador Bunker, the National Security Advisor desired to reveal his secret meetings in Paris “to seize the opportunity to take an initiative and defuse possible congressional and public pressure which may develop when Congress reconvenes [the end of January].”<sup>265</sup> Publicizing the secret talks could silence all of the administration’s critics who had vocally denounced their unwillingness to negotiate with an eager Hanoi. Coupled with the negotiating record and the consistent level of troop reductions, their strategy casted doubt upon those Americans, both within the peace movement, the press and congress, who challenged Nixon’s foreign policy goals since he entered office in 1969.

The peace movement was not completely doormat during the first few months of 1972. As the Nixon Administration continued their bombing campaign of South Vietnam, small burst of demonstrations appeared throughout the country in February.<sup>266</sup> For the traditional peace organizations – the PCPJ and the NPAC – internal divisions continued to cripple the movement’s ability to mount an offensive against the White House.<sup>267</sup> VVAW went through similar transitions. As Kerry and Hubbard faded from the elite ranks of the organization, radical veterans like Barry Romo and Scott Camil came to

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<sup>264</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 477.

<sup>265</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 7, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972*, Letter from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador of Vietnam (Bunker) (Washington DC: January 1, 1972), Document 284.

<sup>266</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 535-536.

<sup>267</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 536.

power; as more pressure on the veterans mounted from illegal tactics executed by the CIA and the FBI, leadership's response became more dangerous and outlandish.<sup>268</sup> The pattern of division, disagreements and financial instability during months of domestic tranquility continued to reemerge throughout the Nixon presidency. However, Nixon, true to his own pattern, made military decisions that ignited the peace movement into action.

On the morning of March 30th, in the nation's capital, Kissinger and Nixon were interrupted by one of Kissinger's aid with a note announcing the beginning of the spring offensive by the North Vietnamese.<sup>269</sup> The onslaught of communist aggression pouring over the DMZ into South Vietnam was not completely unexpected by the Nixon Administration. Government and military officials in RVN had requested approval of proactive aerial assaults over the southern portion of North Vietnam as early as January 20th; in a private conversation between Kissinger and Nixon, Kissinger told the president: "well, he [Abrams] wants to bomb the southern part of North Vietnam, where they have their logistic buildup."<sup>270</sup> However, Nixon had bigger issues on his political plate: his historical trip to China in February. As Nixon prepared to finish the conflict in Indochina, he was actively courting the Chinese and the Russians within the first six months of 1972. The Chinese trip avoided possible complications when Hanoi remained stationed in their own territory through February. However, the communists would not

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<sup>268</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 219-224.

<sup>269</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Editorial Note (Washington DC) Document 47.*

<sup>270</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Washington DC: January 20, 1972), Document 2.*

spare a military offensive entirely in the spring of 1972 and their advance into South Vietnam jeopardized a summit with the Soviets, the stability of the Thieu government and even, Nixon's grasp at re-election in November.

Nixon, often using Kissinger as his sounding board, contemplated how to respond to the North Vietnamese once he realized the fighting in South Vietnam was a full fledged military campaign and not a series of small one-offs. The administration ran into problems on multiple front. First, Laird became a constant problem for Nixon and Kissinger by obstructing intelligence coming from South Vietnam to avoid the obvious negative feedback of the ARVN and U.S. forces.<sup>271</sup> Second, the restrictions that were applied before and after the China trip severely limited how Abrams and other military leaders conducted their response.<sup>272</sup> Lastly, the weather inhibited how air power operated over the DMZ into North Vietnam. The weather delay of B-52s perplexed the president, who, on numerous occasions, commented that the American air force was successfully able to fly during the Battle of the Bulge during snowstorms.<sup>273</sup> However, the hiccup was short lived and the White House quickly drafted a game plan on how to deliver an influential punch to the North Vietnamese despite the various political irons Nixon and Kissinger had in the international fire.

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<sup>271</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Editorial Note (Washington DC), Document 51.*

<sup>272</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Editorial Note (Washington DC), Document 49.*

<sup>273</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff (Moorer) (Washington DC: April 3, 1972), Document 52.*

After China came the Soviet Union. As North Vietnamese soldiers rushed into South Vietnam, Kissinger was preparing his secret trip to Moscow to pave the way for the president to follow in the late spring. The key to understanding how Nixon was prepared to respond militarily during the spring offensive is knowing how it fit within the context of a visit to the Soviet Union to not only achieve a SALT agreement but possibly find a settlement on Vietnam. The Soviets, who supported Hanoi financially throughout the conflict, had motive to revoke their invitation for a joint U.S.-Soviet summit if Nixon's decisions were too harsh. The risk of losing the summit or appearing too weak in Vietnam on the battlefield weighed heavily on Nixon's mind in the early days of April. On April 4th, only five days after the offensive had started, Nixon told Kissinger: "if the Russians – if the Russians knock off the summit as a result of this –" Kissinger reassures Nixon they won't, to which Nixon said, "Well, let me say, if they do, I'm simply going to say I, that we are not going to have the Russ – the communists determine our foreign policy."<sup>274</sup> This trend of Nixon leaning towards military force despite the Soviet summit continued throughout the first of April. On April 6th, two days later, Haig relayed in a memo to Kissinger, "The president accepts the domestic and diplomatic price of an extended air and naval effort against North Vietnam, including the risk of cancellation of the Soviet summit."<sup>275</sup> Nixon confirmed this conclusion in

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<sup>274</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 4, 1972), Document 58.*

<sup>275</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Memorandum from the President Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 6, 1972), Document 67.*

retrospect, as he wrote in his memoir: “Now in this case, my instinct is that one thing is clear: whatever else happens we cannot lose this war. This summit isn’t worth a damn if the price for it is losing in Vietnam. My instinct tells me that the country can take losing the summit, but it can’t take losing the war.”<sup>276</sup> As the month progressed, the president, aware that his actions could destroy any diplomatic movements with the Soviets, decided to move forward with military might despite the Russian consequence.

Nixon and Kissinger concluded that bombs would be dropped over the DMZ into North Vietnam but toyed with bombs going as far north as Hanoi-Haiphong, mining the same area or issuing a blockade in the North Vietnamese ports.<sup>277</sup> By April 15, weather had cleared enough that eighteen B-52s with 1200 bombs and fourteen A6s moved into the Hanoi and Haiphong area, delivering violent blows to the civilian population and military logistic infrastructures.<sup>278</sup> Up until this point, declassified documents and diary entries revealed little concern from the president on domestic backlash in the wake of resumed bombing of the North Vietnam. Besides the Russian summit, the outcome of the bombings on Hanoi’s diplomats in respects to breaking them at the negotiation table

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<sup>276</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Nixon M. Nixon*, 602.

<sup>277</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 4, 1972), Conversation Among President Nixon, the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Secretary of Defense Laird, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) (Washington DC: April 17: 1972), Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 18, 1972), Documents 57, 83, 86.*

<sup>278</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: April 15, 1972, 3:37pm), Document 79.*



impacted Nixon's decisions. After the president unleashed bombs on Hanoi and Haiphong, on April 17th, Nixon and Kissinger explored the possibility of ending the aggression over the North in exchange for negotiations to resume;<sup>279</sup> the meeting planned for April 24th had been cancelled by the communists on the 15th in the wake of continued bombing over their northern cities.<sup>280</sup>

In contrast to the first three years of the presidency, the final year before elections held higher stakes for the Nixon Administration; many of the goals shifted in light of international Cold War breakthroughs and the heat of the upcoming election was only a few months away. After Nixon visited China, he found success with the Chinese. With the impending Soviet summit, he was facing the possibility of real breakthrough on his foreign policy by moving through Cold War barriers. The unsolved Vietnam conflict provided challenges that could cripple his foreign policy, hinder his bid for re-election and disgrace his legacy as president. The resumption of bombing North Vietnam, and wrestling with the decision of mining or issuing a blockade was more complicated than resisting a domestic response. It had bigger implications if his strategy was flawed. A blockade vs mining had a better chance of military success against North Vietnam; according to Kissinger and later, Admiral Moorer, "that mining alone had the political

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<sup>279</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Secretary of Defense Laird, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) (Washington DC: April 17, 1972), Document 83.*

<sup>280</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard M. Nixon*, 590.

advantage that it would not bring a direct physical confrontation.”<sup>281</sup> This greatly differed from decisions made in the years leading up to 1972. Nixon thought in bigger terms than just American and Vietnamese relations, but with Nixon being the first president to shift the political alignment since the beginning of the Cold War, his motivations for military decisions also shifted in 1972. Although documents do acknowledge members of the administration considering the domestic repercussions, consuming conversations between the president and Kissinger show decisions weighed on the diplomatic outcome between the United States and the Soviet Union rather than the anti war efforts on the home front. Despite larger elements of the conflict, like the staling negotiations and the looming Soviet summit, the anti war movement made small and fruitless efforts of protest to gain the president’s attention.

The anti war movement with veterans and civilians alike, tired in its unrelenting effort to achieve an end to the war, organized marches and demonstrations to denounce the resumed bombing of North Vietnam, which was halted in 1968. On April 15th, the same day B-52s raced over the DMZ to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong, the movement marched on Washington DC with arrests amounting to over 300 by the end of the day.<sup>282</sup> However, the march on the capital was the beginning of a week-long national response by the peace movement with demonstrations and student strikes, especially after activists learned about the air raids on April 15th and 16th.<sup>283</sup> The campus strikes and the

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<sup>281</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Memorandum for the Record (Washington DC: May 5, 1972), Document 124.*

<sup>282</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 537.

<sup>283</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 538.

movement's organization fell short in comparison to the response after the Cambodian incursion and Kent State,<sup>284</sup> but reminded many Americans of the division and dissatisfaction that plagued their young, veterans and society as a whole. In fact, some factions of the peace movement felt the typical response of marches, demonstrations, and student strikes had lost their impact. CALC chose to target specific elements of the war machine, like Honeywell Inc., who produced weapons for the war in hopes they could persuade the company to discontinue its commitment to the government and the conflict in Indochina.<sup>285</sup> The veterans, by spring of 1972, a recognizable and important portion of the peace movement, remained silent and allowed their mainstream counterparts to take the lead in resistance and dissidence.<sup>286</sup> Their light was still flickering bright and the events during the summer proved to be their moment to act. The uprising of domestic criticism hardly made a dent on the Nixon war machine. Little did the anti war movement know, the president's moves in mid-April were just the beginning of a forty-five-day campaign to aggressively break the North Vietnamese.

Nixon and Kissinger spent the rest of April, with the help of Moorer and Haig, crafting a plan to hit the communists even harder than just a few days of B-52s raids. The pressure mounted in the beginning of May when Nixon and his policy-makers decided that this was their opportunity to hit Hanoi hard, despite their fear of diplomatic repercussions. After Kissinger's May 2nd meeting with the North Vietnamese flopped – both sides remained steadfast in their stubbornness and inability to find a compromised

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<sup>284</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 538.

<sup>285</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 538-539.

<sup>286</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 224.

settlement – Nixon concluded an extreme military action within the North must be executed.<sup>287</sup> Starting on May 3rd, the day after Kissinger’s meeting with the communists, until the day the operation would be executed, May 8th, the president conferred with Kissinger, Haldeman, Moorer, and Connally to pursue blockade by mining of the North Vietnamese ports starting that evening while Nixon took to the airwaves to announce his decision.<sup>288</sup> The president’s argument, supported by Connally and Kissinger, was mining would provide less direct confrontation with the Soviets than a blockade but applied pressure on Hanoi, by depriving them of supplies to refuel their offensive into the South, and force their hand into renewing honest negotiations with the United States.<sup>289</sup> When Nixon appeared on national television to announce Operation Linebacker on the evening of May 8th, he told Americans that the blockade by mining gave the power back to the U.S., protected the remaining American troops in Vietnam, prevented a communist take over of South Vietnam while avoiding U.S. defeat and set a standard around the world that the U.S. strongly discouraged military aggression by responding with larger acts of force.<sup>290</sup> Nixon promised the bombing and mining could be stopped if Hanoi agreed to a cease-fire, with the Northern troops that had flooded into South Vietnam for the Easter

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<sup>287</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant to National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: May 2, 1972), Document 110.*

<sup>288</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 547-556.

<sup>289</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Editorial Note, Document 126.*

<sup>290</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Memorandum from President Nixon to the Assistant to the President (Haldeman) (Washington DC: May 7, 1972), Document 129.*

offensive returning back over the DMZ, and the return of all American POWS, to which the U.S. would withdraw all military personnel within four months of their return.<sup>291</sup>

Yet again, the president flexed his muscles in a new and creative way. Just like his incursions into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971, he unleashed the last faction of the American military, the U.S. air force, over the DMZ and directly onto the doorstep of North Vietnam. Operation Linebacker did accomplish some of its goals – the mining of North Vietnamese harbors strangled the amount of supplies flowing into the South and the North Vietnamese momentum clearly faltered by mid-May with Hue, Kontum and An Loc escaping Hanoi's control<sup>292</sup> – but it failed to completely demolish the North's capabilities as they remained a threat to South Vietnamese stability throughout the end of U.S. combat involvement.<sup>293</sup> Immediate feedback out of Vietnam and from the Defense Department was glowing. Kissinger told Nixon on May 19th, eleven days after Operation Linebacker started, that Bunker reported the “decision to mine to have been pivotal in the improved posture of the South Vietnamese”<sup>294</sup> and Moorer reported to McCain two days later, “Results of Linebacker operations to date have been most impressive.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 221-228.

<sup>292</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1196.

<sup>293</sup> Ken Hughes, *Fatal Politics: The Nixon Tapes, the Vietnam War, and the Casualties of Reflection* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 62-64.

<sup>294</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972*, Memorandum from the President's Assistant of National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: May 19, 1972) Document 165.

<sup>295</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972*, Message from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain) (Washington DC: May 21, 1972) Document 174.

Operation Linebacker sparked another round of demonstrations from the anti war movement. Unlike the resumed B-52 bombings in mid-April, once quieted activists and some elements of the peace movement factions vocalized their dissatisfaction with another clear expansion of the war by President Nixon. Seven presidents from various Ivy League universities met Kissinger at the White House on May 17th to pressure the administration to terminate the mining of North Vietnam and finish the war with many of the university elite speaking for their outraged students.<sup>296</sup> The VVAW, who had refrained from flashy protest in mid-April, broke their silence; agreeing that Nixon had gone too far this time, the New York/New Jersey chapters petitioned the UN, specifically Ambassador George Bush, to take the United States in custody until all American personnel had withdrawn from Indochina.<sup>297</sup> However, the momentum gained from the student-strikes, protests and sporadic bursts of creative resistance was short lived. Those who found activism in the early 1970s, like their counterparts who came before them, soon felt discouraged; Nixon was clearly conducting the war as he saw fit which included aggression and expansionism.<sup>298</sup> The announcement of Nixon withdrawing another 20,000 troops on April 26th<sup>299</sup> had a split reaction among activists. For those feeling discouraged, the withdrawal announcement further depleted their stamina and convinced others that the war was nearly over; what's the point of continued activism? While

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<sup>296</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1198.

<sup>297</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 224.

<sup>298</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 540-541.

<sup>299</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Editorial Note (Washington DC) Document 99.*

another section believed the troop withdrawal announcement was a small victory for the movement; the fact that Nixon removed more troops from the battlefield during a major North Vietnamese offensive paid “homage to the American peace movement.”<sup>300</sup> The peace movement, dovish congressional leaders and some media outlets were alone in their opposition to Nixon’s actions. Nixon’s popularity spiked, supported through polls collected in the beginning weeks of the operation, with many Americans agreeing with Nixon’s justification for mining.<sup>301</sup>

The residual activism felt on the home front during the spring was nothing compared to response experienced in years past in respects to the Cambodian and Laotian operations. During the entirety of the Vietnam War, infamous and powerful organizations had provided constant pressure on the policy-makers in Washington. As 1972 welcomed elections and what many viewed as the final stage of the war, the traditional anti war movement was stammering with only small bouts of influence on American society. Declassified documents, diary entries and memoirs exclusively address diplomatic and international factors through the winter and spring of 1972; the Soviet summit, negotiations between the U.S. and Hanoi, the American elections, and the outcome of the RVN within the months leading up to November. Although the domestic response is mentioned, it is often brief, underdeveloped and an afterthought. The summer conventions, especially Nixon’s own Republican National Convention in Miami, would see an uptick in well-organized activism that mimicked the intensity, although on a lesser scale, of the 1968 convention in Chicago. But the spring was Nixon’s victory. He

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<sup>300</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 540-541.

<sup>301</sup> Hughes, *Fatal Politics*, 62-64.

unleashed his plan of hard hits and military aggression with very few lasting consequences. Unlike 1969 and 1970, where domestic unrest and the political consequences limited his ability to go full throttle on North Vietnam, he was able to answer Hanoi's advance in the exact way he felt appropriate, regardless of whatever criticism bubbled up on the home front.

The last major spark of resistance was seen at the Republican National Convention when Richard Nixon was nominated again to represent the Republican party in the upcoming November elections. Perhaps the only notable growth that the movement saw in the first six months of 1972 was Tom Hayden's creation, with his movie star and vocal activist wife Jane Fonda, of the Indochina Peace Campaign (IPC) who's goal, unlike most organizations born out of the Vietnam peace movement, was to work within the system and target Congress to achieve a lasting peace throughout Indochina.<sup>302</sup> Activists were present in Miami a month before for the Democratic National Convention in July. However, they lacked organization and White House officials commented not only on their overpowering stench but their inability to muster an offensive with their activism.<sup>303</sup> August's convention in Miami differed slightly to the collection of activists seen in July; the veterans, with their discipline and unrelenting motivation, joined the mob of protesters to challenge Nixon in new and influential ways.

The VVAW had continued to exert their influence within the peace movement but their organization was facing major financial hardships. The Nixon Administration continued to drag activists into courtrooms and although the White House was not

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<sup>302</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 550.

<sup>303</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 551.



winning trials, they were able to drain the VVAW's financial reserves with court and lawyer fees.<sup>304</sup> Nixon's method against the VVAW peaked on July 3rd, 1972 when eight people, including Scott Camil and Pete Mahoney, were subpoenaed by the FBI with charges of "conspiring to promote, incite, and participate in a riot" during the upcoming RNC; the group of combat veterans charged were dubbed the "Gainesville Eight" – the town the group would appear for their first trial.<sup>305</sup> Their legal battle concluded positively for the veterans, with all eight being acquitted but the government's plan to hinder them useless during the RNC was successful.<sup>306</sup> Scott Camil, twenty years later, explained how the indictment of the VVAW leadership was the government's best attempt at derailing their activism; not only would removing the leadership potentially cripple the organization's ability to function, but the federal, state and local infiltrators of the organization took center stage in convincing participating veterans to tarnish their status and jeopardize their freedom by using violence during the DNC and RNC.<sup>307</sup>

Just like SDS and other prominent activist groups targeting change that differed from the government's status quo, the overwhelming problem of FBI and local law enforcement infiltration continued to grow throughout the year. Scott Camil, who oversaw most of the Southern chapters of VVAW, including his home state of Florida, put heavy emphasis on the great efforts the government went to discredit or even destroy

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<sup>304</sup> Nicosia, *War to Home*, 223-224.

<sup>305</sup> Nicosia, *War to Home*, 232-233.

<sup>306</sup> Nicosia, *War to Home*, 237-238.

<sup>307</sup> Scott Camil, "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil." Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 78.

the VVAW. The FBI targeted veterans who had incentive to lie; provocateurs with Vietnam service backgrounds not only struggled with their own development of PVS (Post Vietnam-Syndrome or later identified as PTSD) but they often fabricated the level of violence they were hearing at meetings, to appear in danger and demand more money for their troubles.<sup>308</sup> They also shared falsehoods with the veterans. Many undercover agents masquerading as veterans convinced VVAW leadership that after attending various demonstrations throughout the nation, cops were shooting protesters or beating them violently; specifically, during VVAW preparations for the RNC, agents were telling Camil and other veterans that cops were coming to Miami to hurt, or worse, murder protesters from all walks of the anti war movement.<sup>309</sup> This had a profound impact on the events leading up to the RNC and manifested quickly into the indictment of the Gainesville Eight. The fear of local and state law enforcement cornering a large section of demonstrators in Miami Beach, the veterans, who were trained to act and plan logically, created contingency plans before the RNC to protect activists from meeting a dangerous fate at the hands of the government.<sup>310</sup> To ensure Camil and his men were eliminated as an asset to his organization, agents attended planning meetings and documented the outlandish plans, some tangible and others just ideas bounced back and forth between weathered, determined veteran activists, later to present it as evidence in

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<sup>308</sup> Camil, Scott. "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil" Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 72-73.

<sup>309</sup> Scott Camil, "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil" Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 73.

<sup>310</sup> Scott Camil, "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil" Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 73-77.

the Gainesville Eight trial that would take place a year later.<sup>311</sup> The government's effort to infiltrate the VVAW was crafty. Although they were successful in tying up the veteran leadership and left them limited in their impact during both conventions in Florida, the Vietnam veterans were able to accomplish many of their goals in the months of July and August. The discipline and uncanny emergence of unexpected men within the organization who quickly filled the void propelled their activism to leave a mark on the politicians, media and Americans who were involved in the RNC.

Going into the summer, after suffering little progress as Nixon resumed the bombing and introducing the mining of Haiphong harbor, the veterans felt their best bet to shake up a flailing and uninventive anti war movement was to participate in the Republican National Convention: "the vets knew they could take center stage as no other challenger or lobbying group could, and that was the major contribution they hoped to make in Miami."<sup>312</sup> The week the veterans spent in Miami had parallels to their week spent in Washington the year before. As youth-led and chaotic anti war groups battled with a tarnished image whenever they marched on Washington, the veterans commanded a respect, despite their hippie appearances. The skills they learned throughout military service translated to a clean, well-organized and comprehensive form of domestic protest. This was no different in Flamingo Park, Miami, Florida.

The veterans arrived together and in force on August 19th, 1972. The first stage of their operational resistance, Operation Last Patrol, was successful; a caravan of over 1300

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<sup>311</sup> Scott Camil, "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil" Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 75-78.

<sup>312</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 231.

veterans and their partners traveled from across the country, careful to follow every traffic law as to not entice the parade of law enforcement following the servicemen, and entered Flamingo Park with the usual display of orderly splendor, foreshadowing the events to come.<sup>313</sup> Unlike their experience in Washington during the Dewey Canyon III protest, the veterans shared their physical and organizational space with other factions of the anti war movement. However, the veterans maintained their respected status of well-disciplined and focused; the VVAW took full responsibility of the security detail in Flamingo Park, overseeing the safety of all the organizations that had arrived to Miami Beach to protest the RNC.<sup>314</sup> The scene at Miami Beach was reminiscent of a warzone with over 3,000 national guardsmen and 500 marines on constant patrol, with a close eye on the protesters.<sup>315</sup> Although the veterans remembered their public role as peaceful, respectful and law abiding ex-military personnel during their demonstration in the capital – a role they continued in Miami – they had several strategies of civil disobedience to shake up the RNC protests.

Ron Kovic, famous for his autobiography *Born on the Fourth of July*, which later was adapted into a movie starring Tom Cruise, was handicapped during his tour in Vietnam, leaving him paralyzed and wheelchair bound. With the VVAW often using their disabled activists as their visual front-runners during demonstrations, Kovic surpassed just an image of crippled veteran restricted to a wheelchair. His vocal

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<sup>313</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 233-236.

<sup>314</sup> Scott Camil, “Oral History Interview of Scott Camil” Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 85-86.

<sup>315</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 238-239.

eloquence shaped his influence within the organization and especially during the RNC; Kovic entered the barracks that housed the visiting guardsmen, spoke with an off-the-cuff passion that began influencing the service men against their orders before their superiors locked Kovic out to halt his persuasive cries of resistance.<sup>316</sup> Camil, who had traveled to Miami, despite his attorney's advice of staying away from the RNC, recalled Ron Kovic enticing law enforcement with derogatory terms knowing if they retaliated, the media and American public would think harshly upon a policeman that tossed a paralyzed Vietnam veteran out of his wheelchair.<sup>317</sup> Kovic gained momentum as the week dredged on and he would make his final stand on the floor of the Republican National Convention.

Before Kovic and his disabled cohorts appeared before Nixon himself, the VVAW had organized a march unlike any they had done in the past. On Tuesday, August 22nd, the veterans planned to march from their encampment at Flamingo Park to the Fontainebleau Hotel where Nixon and many other Republican delegates were scheduled to stay; however, the march would be conducted completely in silence, down to the very commands being used alongside the rows of disciplined ex-soldiers.<sup>318</sup> It was unlike anything most witnesses of Vietnam anti war demonstrations ever experienced. Bystanders broke into tears while many stood in awe in the eerie silence that followed the veteran resisters.<sup>319</sup> The march ended with a stand off at the Fontainebleau hotel between

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<sup>316</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 239.

<sup>317</sup> Scott Camil, "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil" Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 78-79.

<sup>318</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 240-242.

<sup>319</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 240-242.

the Vietnam veterans and over a hundred officers; speeches and a sit in broke out, blocking traffic, and right as Ron Kovic and two other activists adorned with wheelchairs prepared to enter the hotel to lie in wait for the president, Barry Romo shattered the organization's chance to confront the Commander in Chief by wrapping up the demonstration and sending everyone back to Flamingo Park.<sup>320</sup> The veterans missed their chance for a perfect opportunity to ambush the man responsible for continuing the bloody war in Vietnam for another four years. Although Ron Kovic, Bobby Muller and Bill Wyman would try to for Nixon's attention at the convention, the chance never came again.

The final ramp up of the RNC again, included Ron Kovic. The chaos that ensued outside of the convention walls felt familiar to those who experienced or followed the events of the 1968 DNC in Chicago. The police utilized tear gas and their billy-clubs to violently suppress any execution of resistance planned by the protesters.<sup>321</sup> Kovic was able to enter the convention building, along with Muller and Wyman, with Camil commenting, "He [Kovic] was able to get credentials somehow and get on the floor of the Republican Convention. He just made contacts."<sup>322</sup> They had another opportunity to distinguish themselves from the other protesters by appearing directly in Nixon's eye line. They would not be able to speak to him – that once in a life time possibility was

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<sup>320</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 242-243.

<sup>321</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 243-245.

<sup>322</sup> Scott Camil, "Oral History Interview of Scott Camil" Interview by Stuart Landers. University of Florida Library, October 20, 1992, 79.

destroyed the night before – but they hoped to awaken the president to the servicemen’s opposition to his past and current policies in Vietnam.

Once Kovic was on the floor of the convention he achieved two things. First, after ignored and force back from the main Republican delegates, his loud protests caught the attention of CBS reporter Roger Mudd who interviewed Kovic.<sup>323</sup> He joined Wyman and Muller, clutching anti war signs that convention members ripped from their hands, and once Nixon took the stage, the trio chanted “Stop the bombing!” and “Stop killing women and children!”; they were forcefully removed from the rest of the convention.<sup>324</sup> Overall, the efforts exercised during the summer in Miami had little impact on the outcome of the election in November. Nixon was overwhelmingly re-elected. Enough people believed the methods he used to manage the war in Vietnam was successful or appropriate and voiced their approval in the voting booth. The VVAW managed another profound and thought-provoking demonstration but quickly refocused their financial and physical energy on saving their comrades who were fighting the federal government in court. As August faded and the autumn months of 1972 arrived, the administration had bigger prospects than anti war demonstrations. For Kissinger and Nixon, who found security in the favorable growing gap between himself and Democratic nominee McGovern, the final months of the year were dedicated to negotiations and the prospects of a final peace settlement.

Although negotiations were fruitless until after Nixon’s re-election in November 1973, the progression of Nixon and Kissinger’s peace plan were crucial to understanding

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<sup>323</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 245.

<sup>324</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 246.

how determined these policy-makers were in crafting the outcome of the Vietnam War to profit their goals, desires and legacy, regardless of the pressure applied by domestic opposition. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1972, private negotiations were broken off and resumed as each side attempted to outmaneuver the other on the battlefield. When it became clear that Hanoi could not overcome the South after a summer of military stalemate and the acceptable timetable of American involvement was quickly running out, the two sides began to make progress. A suitable settlement that appeased both sides seemed to be coming a reality.

On August 1, a week before the protests in Miami erupted, Kissinger and Lu Duc Tho resumed serious talks on how to conclude the war in Vietnam. This meeting marked the turn in four years of little movement. Despite the U.S. bringing little change to their position, the North Vietnamese gave up their demand for a timetable on the United State's withdrawal<sup>325</sup> and forfeited their future control of a coalition government with 50/50 co-leadership between the RVN, losing their vetoing power.<sup>326</sup> The emerging possibility of finding a settlement before the election resulted in differing outlooks between Nixon and Kissinger. Henry Kissinger believed Hanoi was growing fearful of Nixon's re-election – the polls by August had Nixon 10 points a head of McGovern –<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 306.

<sup>326</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)* (Washington DC: August 2, 1972) Document 224.

<sup>327</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's*



and concerned the president, untethered by a campaign, would unleash full military fury after November 7th, seriously jeopardizing Hanoi's chances at outlasting American involvement.<sup>328</sup> Nixon, however, believed the complete opposite. He was reluctant on settling the war before the election, deciding a settlement would have no domestic impact and would ignite criticism among his conservative base right before the election<sup>329</sup>; perhaps the president dreamed of one last shot at complete military victory and concluded, much like the Vietnamese feared, that after the election he would be free to pound the Vietnamese into complete submission. Haldeman confirms Nixon's desire to settle after the election, concerned it would all appear to be a ploy to bolster Nixon's prospects at re-election.<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, the trajectory of the negotiations throughout the fall leading up to November 7th illustrated the clear differences between the two policy-makers on how and when the settlement should be achieved.

The remainder of August and September had Kissinger meeting with Hanoi several more times, with further concessions from both sides and the reality of a settlement not far from completion. After an August 14th meeting that appeared to be a "holding action for both sides",<sup>331</sup> the two sides resumed serious talks on September 15; Kissinger rejected Hanoi's proposal but a two-day meeting scheduled for the end of the month was

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Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: August 2, 1972) Document 224.

<sup>328</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 299-300.

<sup>329</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 299.

<sup>330</sup> Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 621.

<sup>331</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 308.

a positive result with an inclination, especially for Kissinger, that prospects were turning serious.<sup>332</sup> In a memo to Nixon on September 19th, 1972, Kissinger said, “They [Hanoi] now appear to have a great appreciation of U.S. political realities and seem to be more aware of the ever diminishing significance of the Vietnam issue in the context of our overall foreign and domestic policies.”<sup>333</sup> This statement also implied the American people no longer held the quagmire in Vietnam as important, relevant and worth holding their full attention. The September 26/27 meeting provided the biggest breakthrough yet. The North Vietnamese admitted to having troops in Cambodia and Laos along with further concessions; Hanoi would release all U.S. POWs, including those that were imprisoned in Laos, and had moved away from demands of a coalition government with the GVN/PRG having more say after the settlement was signed and the Americans left.<sup>334</sup> When Kissinger returned to Paris on October 8th, he finally felt that the end was near. Despite Kissinger reporting that the meetings were “tense and volatile”,<sup>335</sup> after several days of negotiations America’s National Security Advisor concluded “my judgement at this juncture would be that they appear ready to accept a ceasefire in place in the near

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<sup>332</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 317-319.

<sup>333</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: September 19, 1972) Document 263.

<sup>334</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Washington DC: September 28, 1972) Document 267.

<sup>335</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume 9, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973, Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon (Paris: October 9, 1972) Document 4.

future.”<sup>336</sup> In fact, Kissinger was so confident that the end was near, when he returned to Washington to deliver the good news to Nixon, he told him “Well, you got three out of three, Mr. President. It’s well on the way.”<sup>337</sup> Kissinger felt it was the best possible settlement that both the United States and South Vietnam could achieve; the North Vietnamese capitulated on their demand for a coalition government, accepted the continued U.S. aid going into South Vietnam after U.S. combat troops withdrew and a ceasefire would take place immediately upon the two sides signing the agreement.<sup>338</sup> To many activists, and later historians, the terms that Kissinger found satisfactory were too similar to what the North Vietnamese had been offering since 1969. Regardless, Kissinger believed Hanoi had given in to demands that the United States had been offering since their shift in policy in the fall and winter of 1970 and 1971.

Despite Kissinger working progressively towards peace from August to October, the Nixon Administration hit one major roadblock: President Thieu. The several meetings in August resulted in minor protest from the South Vietnamese leader, who rejected the proposal offered by Hanoi and voiced his dissatisfaction with the direction that the negotiations were going in.<sup>339</sup> As Kissinger experienced breakthroughs with the North Vietnamese by September and early October, the problem with Thieu continued to

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<sup>336</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 9, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973, Backchannel Message from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)* (Washington DC: October 12, 1972) Document 8.

<sup>337</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 9, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973, Editorial Note, Document 9.*

<sup>338</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 327-328.

<sup>339</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 305.

amount to the point where it consumed Kissinger and Nixon's dealings with Vietnam in correlation with the negotiations. When Kissinger and Ambassador Bunker met with Thieu throughout September, he responded emotionally, often shedding tears in protest of the conclusion of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.<sup>340</sup> The biggest stipulation that the Nixon Administration had been unwilling to budge from was keeping President Thieu's regime intact upon the signing of a peace agreement; now the same man was hindering any prospects of a settlement that somewhat favored the United State's interests. As the early October negotiations revealed a final wrap up of American combat forces in Vietnam, the Nixon Administration seriously underestimated the length Thieu would go to derail the possible settlement. Both Kissinger and Bunker attempted to appease Thieu's worries but his constant stonewalling continued to clog up the proposed timeline that Kissinger and Tho had agreed upon in the beginning of October; Kissinger eventually returned to Paris to work out further details, therefore, providing more time for Thieu to come around and possibly accomplish more changes that would sweeten the deal for the two allies.<sup>341</sup>

The optimism that was felt in early October quickly dissipated. Hanoi, frustrated with the United States, went public on October 25, announcing an accurate account of the proposed agreement.<sup>342</sup> The Nixon Administration felt it necessary to counteract the publication of the settlement with Kissinger taking to national television. The National Security Advisor had never spoken to the nation due to his thick German accent but

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<sup>340</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 322-323.

<sup>341</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 359-371.

<sup>342</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 373.

Nixon aired Kissinger announcing, infamously, “We believe peace is at hand.”<sup>343</sup>

However, the defensive move backfired domestically. It alluded to the American people that the current negotiations would produce an immediate result. However, when the fall and winter months drug on through the new year with no settlement, coupled with the eventual resumption of bombing over North Vietnam, many Americans felt misled by their leadership with Kissinger, admitting “Nixon and I did not discuss the domestic political implications.”<sup>344</sup>

The negotiations resumed in November, with little success. By December, Hanoi reintroduced demands that had been eliminated in October and Kissinger, discouraged, wrote “Hanoi, recently so eager for a settlement, had referred to the previous tactics of psychological warfare.”<sup>345</sup> Before American military involvement finally reached it’s end with a major breakthrough on January 9th, 1973 and the peace settlement officially signed on January 23, 1973,<sup>346</sup> the Nixon Administration flexed their muscles one last time with a dramatic aerial bombardment over North Vietnam in December, often referred to as the Christmas bombings or officially, Operation Linebacker II. Kissinger explained the decision was twofold; on one side, Nixon was militarily forcing Hanoi back to the negotiating table and on the other side, he attempted to prove to Saigon that the United States would honor their commitment, therefore, forcing them militarily to accept

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<sup>343</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 374.

<sup>344</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 374-375.

<sup>345</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 408.

<sup>346</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 376-377.

a future peace proposal.<sup>347</sup> Nixon confirmed Kissinger's reasoning, adding, the brief period of bombing over North Vietnam was successful, from the administration's standards, and broke the military will of Hanoi.<sup>348</sup>

From the last push at the RNC during the summer and through the fall, the anti war movement had been quiet – with respect to Hayden's IPC who received some attention; fall demonstrations provided low turnout and for the first time since the war had started in 1965, there was no call for spring demonstrations.<sup>349</sup> However, Nixon's violent decision to dump bombs over civilians, during Christmas, within the same months that Americans were promised peace was at hand, moved many activists to protest his decision. Small bursts of activism surfaced with demonstrations after Operation Linebacker II started and the PCPJ/NPAC rallied activists to protest Nixon during his second inauguration in January.<sup>350</sup> By January, the settlement had recalled all troops from Vietnam and when POWs started returning over the spring months, it was the end of the formal Vietnam anti war movement. Organizations like the VVAW remained intact for a while longer but switched their focus to solving veteran problems – unemployment, poorly run VAs and drug addiction – and away from the war effort. The finale for many peace activists would not arrive until the following year when Nixon would leave office, disgraced by his involvement in the Watergate cover-up, and unable to follow through on his commitment of returning to Vietnam if Hanoi reneged on their end of the settlement

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<sup>347</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 409.

<sup>348</sup> Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 158.

<sup>349</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 555-558.

<sup>350</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 361.

by overrunning the DMZ into South Vietnam. However, for those that followed the negotiations and understood where the U.S. had started and what they had signed in 1973, many concluded that the peace with honor that the president claimed he had finally accomplished was far from accurate.

Nixon needed to protect the South Vietnamese government to protect his own justifications for continuing the war for another four years. Kissinger had dug in to keeping Thieu throughout the negotiation process, which started in 1969, and it was a bargaining chip the administration was not willing to cash in at any point. With the declassification of many government documents, new theories emerged that Kissinger and Nixon were fighting for a decent interval between when the U.S. left and Hanoi could resume their quest of removing the government in Saigon; therefore, remaining blameless in the downfall of a Once-American ally. Both Kissinger and Nixon knew that Congress was quickly closing in to revoke continued funding of the war, even after all of soldiers had shipped out. Kissinger fought hard for a settlement before the election as he was fearful that time would be incredibly limited from Nixon's re-election to when Congress reconvened, leaving Hanoi a small window to wait out until Congress stripped the president of any leverage. The Christmas bombings end on December 29, credited not to the burst of domestic unrest but to a president desperately trying to persuade North Vietnam with military might back to the negotiating table, knowing full well that his aggression may encourage a faster resolution to end funding for the war by Congress.<sup>351</sup> All elite policy-makers acknowledged the tight window they were operating in before Congress returned in January and almost certain they would strip any funding for the

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<sup>351</sup> Hughes, *Fatal Politics*, 140-150.

South Vietnamese government. So their promise to Thieu that they would return if North Vietnam went back on the settlement was false. Nixon needed to buy himself enough time, a decent interval, between his negotiated “peace with honor” and the return of the communist forces; this solution would provide a finger to point at other policy makers and keep Nixon out of the fire. And that’s exactly what he got. Nixon blamed Congress for a rushed settlement, knowing they would cut funding to the war and several years later, when North Vietnam invaded the South, the guilt was volleyed to Congress again, accusing their withdrawal of reoperations for the north resulted in the communists no longer having incentive to respect the settlement guidelines.<sup>352</sup>

Nixon and Kissinger also identified that Hanoi was unlikely to respect the peace agreement’s guidelines, especially the ceasefire. Days before Kissinger was slated to return to Paris on October 8, the set of meetings that produced a massive breakthrough and the infamous statement “peace at hand”, Kissinger told Nixon, “And they’ll [North and South Vietnam] go at each other with Thieu in office. That’s what I think.”<sup>353</sup> The same day in a conversation with just the president, Kissinger proclaimed “The practical consequences of their proposals, nine out of ten, is that there’ll never be elections and a cease-fire.”<sup>354</sup> A large portion of what Kissinger had been fighting for – a cease-fire and

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<sup>352</sup> Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 165-178.

<sup>353</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Among President Nixon, the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: September 29, 1972) Document 269.*

<sup>354</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 8, Vietnam, January-October 1972, Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) (Washington DC: September 29, 1972, 3:16-3:30pm) Document 270.*



elections without a coalition government – were not even feasible in his reality. They may be able to get a public declaration of what Hanoi intended to do, but after the United States had mostly left Indochina, they could resume as they had proceeded before.

The decent interval theory was introduced in the last years of negotiating with the first recognized policy shift towards the United States no longer demanding Hanoi to withdraw from South Vietnam as early as September, 1970.<sup>355</sup> The idea of the decent interval theory is Nixon and Kissinger, after several years of unsuccessfully defeating Hanoi on the battlefield, shifted their policy to allow Hanoi the biggest interval of time between the removal of American combat troops and the return of communist fighting forces to overthrow the South Vietnamese government. The interval would give the Nixon Administration enough distance from how they settled the war and the demise of South Vietnam so they could lay the blame on other elements of the government, not themselves.

Perhaps the biggest example to support this theory is the shift from a complete North Vietnamese withdrawal from South Vietnam to a cease-fire-in-place. The first several years of private talks between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger resulted in a steadfast American point of view that mutual withdrawals are the only way the South could survive once the United States had retreated. In July 1969, only six months after Nixon had entered the White House, he declared “the most detrimental effect of a Vietnam settlement would be a settlement that produced communist victory in a few years.”<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 27.

<sup>356</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Memorandum of Conversation (Bangkok: July 29, 1969), Document 102.*

American policy during this time period supported this statement. At this point, the administration was encouraging all participants in both private and public talks in Paris to avoid discussing de-escalation; if the DRV brought up this point, the only context it should be discussed was encouraging mutual withdrawal.<sup>357</sup> This remained American policy until late 1970, early 1971. The shift occurs after multiple, failed American operations and several years of fruitless military progression. Domestic unrest and the continuous acts of resistance against the war were weighing heavily on the administration. The expectation that the U.S. could aggressively submit Hanoi to the American will at the negotiating table was lost. A new strategy, accepting a cease-fire, was far more plausible than forcing Hanoi to accept mutual withdrawals. However, Nixon and Kissinger understood a cease-fire would provide easy access for a resumption of fighting among the North and the South once the Westerns had left. Their strategy had to change enough to support an outcome in Vietnam that would protect Nixon's reputation as a leader.

The two leaders, Kissinger and Nixon, denied any backhanded negotiating that promised Hanoi the United States would not return to Vietnam if the communist supplied a decent interval of time before they ascended on Saigon. Addressing public criticism years after the end of the war, Kissinger acknowledged the decent interval theory, saying "in terms of the formal diplomatic positions, Nixon (and I) repeatedly affirmed that the United States would accept a political outcome based on free elections. In that sense, we

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<sup>357</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 6, Part 1, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Talking Points for President Nixon (Washington DC: March 31, 1969), Document 50.*

were negotiating for an interval before those elections.”<sup>358</sup> The administration had every intension of returning to Vietnam if, or when, Hanoi resumed arms against the South<sup>359</sup> but this argument has no structural support when elite policy-makers within the White House openly acknowledged the looming Congress aid cut-off was expected in January. In fact, conversations and memorandums shared between Kissinger and Nixon refer to a decent interval, in some shape or form, way before the negotiations in the fall of 1972. Kissinger sent a memorandum to Nixon on September 18, 1971 stating “We can heal the wounds in this country as our men left peace behind on the battlefield and a healthy interval for South Vietnam’s fate to unfold.”<sup>360</sup> The words “decent interval” appear in writing in the summer of 1971. As Kissinger jetted off to China for a pre-summit meeting with Zhou Enlai, written in the top corner of the “Indochina” portion of the briefing book was “We want a decent interval. You have our assurance.”<sup>361</sup> In May 1972, shortly after another North Vietnamese offensive stalled, in a documentation of a conversation, Kissinger announced “What we mean is that we will not leave in such a way that a communist victory is guaranteed. However, we are prepared to leave so that a communist victory is not excluded, though not guaranteed.”<sup>362</sup> Lastly, two days before Kissinger returned to Paris for the series of meetings resulting in an early breakthrough, privately and secretly recorded, Kissinger states “and Thieu says that sure, this – these proposals

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<sup>358</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 338.

<sup>359</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 338-339.

<sup>360</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 198.

<sup>361</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 120-121.

<sup>362</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 233.

keep him going, but somewhere down the road he'll have no choice except to commit suicide and he's probably right."<sup>363</sup> and "But – and I also think that Thieu is right, that our terms will eventually destroy him."<sup>364</sup> The public stance the administration was taking – that their settlement was indeed, peace with honor and preserving the democratic traditions of an allied South Vietnamese government – did not coincide with what was being discussed under the protection of secrecy. Kissinger's denial of the decent interval is unfounded as many conversations and correspondences supported the men's clear desire to carve out a chunk of time before the collapse of Saigon – a collapse they knew was coming.

The continued journey of Nixon's dedication to enforcing a peace with honor in Indochina was cut short when the growing investigation of the Watergate scandal and cover-up eventually unearthed the president's involvement, forcing him disgracefully out of office. For activists like Ellsberg and Hayden, to name a few of many, felt the anti war movement's unrelenting pressure pressed Nixon to make decisions that led to his eventual impeachment. For those activists who experienced another four years of war believed Nixon would continue supporting the Thieu regime in South Vietnam and feared the war would not end with the removal of combat forces in 1973. With the president taking his untimely leave from the White House, the anti war movement could finally put down their arms of resistance and dissidence and bask in the warmth of knowing the true end was finally near.

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<sup>363</sup> Hugh, *Fatal Politics*, 185.

<sup>364</sup> Hugh, *Fatal Politics*, 186.

## Chapter VIII.

### Final Conclusions on the Peace Movement and Their Impact on Nixon's Foreign Policy in Vietnam

Like most presidencies, Nixon's first term was jammed packed with domestic and foreign events that shaped the legacy the man would leave to American history. With the Watergate scandal finishing Nixon's run as president in 1974, the highlights that are attributed to the president are often his foreign policy accomplishments. He had broken barriers between once Cold War enemies, the Soviet Union and China, while finally ending the war in Vietnam with an honorable peace. After Nixon died in the late 1980s, declassified documents, memoirs and diary entries began to shape the truth behind Nixon's foreign policy in Vietnam. Historians and academics were better equipped to understand the true complexities behind the Nixon and Kissinger Administration. Just as scholars have focused on China and Russia's influence on the president's policies in Vietnam, so few have taken seriously the grave influence the American peace movement had on the policy makers in the White House throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. The public narrative, perpetuated by Nixon and Kissinger, that the entitled hippies who identified with the anti war effort throughout the Vietnam War were violent, unruly, vapid, and guilty of attempting to destroy the great American democracy. Furthermore, the only achievement they could lay claim to was destroying the tranquility of the American home front during wartime and slandering the successes of great American diplomats. The narrative concluded with these activists, who were hell bent on finding peace in Vietnam by ending the war, failed. Fortunately, the truth behind Nixon's foreign

policy decisions remained intact throughout various forums for historians and other scholars to fact check the president's claims. For the peace movement who claimed they were the driving force behind a hawkish president's decisions and the bureaucrats who dismissed their efforts as wasted, the truth, as always, lay conveniently in between.

The peace movement was able to limit, control and restrict the extremes of Nixon's war making abilities and prohibit him from unleashing the full capabilities of the American military throughout Indochina from 1969 through 1971. The damage that the anti war movement had inflicted on the American political structure up until 1969 left a lasting impression on the policy makers within the Nixon Administration. It caused them to think twice before executing any military operation as to contemplate how the movement would response and if they did, how bad would the backlash hurt Nixon's personal interests. However, when the peace movement was functioning at it's highest capabilities, Nixon was still able to outmaneuver his domestic critics, often times secretly or utilizing a form of power that average American simply lacked, to achieve his foreign policy goals and satisfy his political agenda.

The first two years, from 1969 till the middle of 1971, show the hold that the anti war movement had over the White House. While Nixon was adjusting to his duties as president and understanding how to interact militarily with both the North and South Vietnamese, he struggled with decisions concerning Vietnam, fearful his actions would ignite a firestorm at home and limit his presidency to one term. Operation DUCK HOOK was perhaps the best example of the dilemma that Nixon often faced. By the end of his presidency, once he resumed the bombing of North Vietnam, he reiterated several times the regret of not going forward with Operation DUCK HOOK early on in his career.

However, his uncertainty of the punch that the peace movement could deliver in 1969 limited his acts of aggression. Nixon's naivety faded with each passing year but the level of efficiency and the legacy of the peace movement restricted the president's freedom in foreign policy. The secret bombing of Cambodia in the first few months of the president's first term was another example of restrictions the movement put on the White House. Fully aware the movement would ramp up their student strikes, demonstrations and vocal criticism of the administration when they learned he had expanded the war into Cambodia, Nixon chose to use deceit and secrecy by hiding the full extent of American war making in Indochina. Nixon had a delicate timeframe once he entered the White House to push his foreign strategies in a certain direction. He could not afford to make a blundering error that would result in such a high level of domestic upheaval and give the pot-smoking, long-haired student-led, New Left the power to dictate how he conducted the war in Vietnam.

The second year of the Nixon Administration was constrained to similar boundaries imposed by the anti war movement. However, coming off prosperous poll numbers and a sensation of support by the silent majority of American voters, Nixon expanded the war outside of Vietnam and committed American ground troops to Cambodia when the threat of a communist take-over seemed emanate. The president challenged the domestic opposition that kept his first year limited to only mild operations. The backlash felt by the Cambodian incursion throughout the American governing body was profound. The weeks of student strikes, burnt ROTC buildings, protests, marches and sit-ins swiftly reminded diplomats across the country the fury that comes when military escalation is openly pursued in the face of the American peace movement. The students

killed at Kent State and Jackson State kept the anti war movement relevant, and for many, planted seeds of doubt that later converted indifferent citizens to the cause. But the aftermath of Kent State and Cambodia inspired house representatives to use their own power to pass legislation that could legitimately stop the president from continuing the war. Nixon's challenge was answered in full and provided a new set of guidelines for which the president had to maneuver around when preparing his next ramp up of military aggression in Indochina.

After 1970, the traditional peace movement, plagued with financial ruin, organizational disputes and a high level of participant burn-out rates, quieted down and was inflicting little damage to a well oiled Nixon fighting machine. However, just in time, the explosion of the Vietnam veterans onto the scene caused another element of restraint on the angle Nixon was playing to. His ability to discredit the servicemen who had sacrificed everything to execute American policy overseas in Southeast Asia was near impossible; not to mention, they challenged his lies and corrected the record when policy makers depended on deception to justify their actions. They were a dangerous group of men and Nixon knew it. Their enlightened forms of protest and the vast amount of classified information they possessed through their experiences actively serving in Vietnam handicapped Nixon better than the New Left could. The president and his men, time and time again, manipulated the images of the youthful protesters to slander their message and vindicate his warfare methodology. Nixon now faced a new branch of activists, disciplined and determined, fact checking his every statement and ready to denounce his claims when they were intended to create more death and war. His strategy



of perpetuating false information and covert foreign policy that had served him well up until 1970 was no longer a full proof, safe, viable option.

The first two years provided the best results for the peace movement. Despite moments of regression – with Nixon implementing policies and conducting operations that increased military commitments throughout Indochina – the anti war activists were able to restrict how far the president was able to go before there were personal consequences. Organizers were able to plan efficient demonstrations that drew hundreds of thousands to their marches nationwide and gather enough media attention, especially after Cambodia, among policy makers in Congress. However, the ability of the peace movement to keep a heavy check on the president waned in the final two years of his presidency. Nixon found major international success by breaking barriers with Cold War adversaries and did just enough to convince many Americans that his policy in Vietnam was one of achieving peace and not expanding U.S. aggression for total victory.

By 1971, Nixon had adjusted his strategy when conducting foreign policy in Vietnam. This rang true against the American peace movement and his negotiating stance against North Vietnam. He was able to craft clever counterattacks on the New Left to discredit their message and manipulated the flow of information reaching Americans nationwide. Nixon emphasized the value of leaving Vietnam in the proper way as to not only follow through with their commitment to the South Vietnamese but retrieve POWs and other military men who remained imprisoned throughout the jungle lands of Southeast Asia. Several times a year, the president announced further troop withdrawals, convincing average citizens that the war was indeed, coming to a close. The peace movement, exhausted, overworked and disillusioned by the Nixon war machine became a

quiet background noise throughout a war-fatigued society. However, the momentum that the movement had created in the aftermath of Cambodia and beyond would still provide constraints to Nixon and Kissinger. When the White House announced Operation Lam Son 719, the major takeaway was the lack of American boys participating in the fighting. The anti war movement had provided enough pressure to keep Nixon from authorizing another Cambodian incursion fiasco; the ARVN were to take on all combat responsibilities while the only aid that American troops provided were logistical and restrained behind Vietnamese borders. Doves in Congress, actively listening to their anti war constituents, passed larger amounts of legislation aimed at de-funding the war or limiting the executive powers of the president in his war making abilities. This was a trend that continued to climb until the signing of the peace accords in January, 1973. Nixon found ways to advance his political agenda in the final years of the war but it was a constant battle between his administration and the U.S. Congress, with the House successfully passing bills that handicapped the White House.

Two international developments gave Nixon and Kissinger an advantage and provided breathing room between themselves and their critics during the final year of his first term. First, Nixon traveled to China in February 1972, bridging a gap that had formed between the two countries with the introduction of the Cold War. Later, in May of 1972, Nixon traveled to the Soviet Union to discuss the quagmire in Vietnam and the two countries agreed on new SALT guidelines. At home, Nixon enjoyed the accolades that came with finding peace among countries that had been enemies only five years before. These achievements, coupled with further troop withdrawals, persuaded voters the president had fulfilled his promise and was accomplishing peace beyond Southeast

Asia. With the North Vietnamese unleashing a new offensive in late March that continued up until the U.S. elections in the fall of 1972, the president had more backing and the ability to bring the full fury of the American military onto Vietnam with little consequences or threatening domestic outcry. The final year of Nixon's first term differed from the previous three years. The containment he felt by the peace movement no longer appeared to be a contender in his foreign policy decisions; 1972 was the most violent year under the Nixon Administration. He resumed the controversial bombing over the DMZ, as far north as Haiphong harbor and Hanoi, introduced a blockade by mining the North Vietnamese harbors, and prolonged negotiations throughout the New Year, to finally agree to a settlement that hardly differed from what was offered four years before and would ultimately, sell out the South Vietnamese president who Nixon and Kissinger had sworn to protect. Nixon's motivation was how the majority of American voters reacted to his foreign policy throughout the world, not just in Vietnam, and by 1973, the peace movement was running out of steam and causing little change in how average voters responded in the voting booths. The Easter Offensive by the North Vietnamese, and Nixon's achievements in the Soviet Union and China, provided enough confidence to resume bombing and add mining with little domestic backlash. With the crazies among the peace movement supporting Democratic candidate McGovern, who was always trailing in the polls, Nixon knew that his military desires in Vietnam could finally be executed without the anti war activists getting in the way. Lastly, with negotiations heating up by the end of the summer, it made little sense to change leadership just as the Nixon Administration was finding a settlement. The pattern had changed dramatically in

1972. The president was finally able to pursue the course of military action in Vietnam before the election without fearing the consequences of domestic opposition.

Nixon, like his predecessors, participated in U.S. politics with a level of secrecy, manipulation and deceit that advanced his own goals while shielding his true intentions from voting Americans. With the publication of the Pentagon Papers, stolen from the RAND corporation by Daniel Ellsberg and published by first the *New York Times* and the Washington Post to follow, average Americans quickly understood they had been manipulated by their government. Many had lost loved ones in a conflict that was dubbed unwinnable by elite policy makers early on in the war. Although Johnson was the Commander in Chief when the study had been conducted, Nixon was perpetuating the same mistakes by searching for total, military victory when the study made it clear that U.S. victory was unattainable. The activists and draft dodgers had inspired Ellsberg to risk his freedom to expose the government's lies. It casted doubt on the current administration and the activities they were pursuing in the name of "peace with honor". It was a huge blow to an administration that had functioned on secrecy and it required their future actions to have an element of transparency. Perhaps more important, the publication of the Pentagon Papers ignited a chain of events that would eventually dethrone the president after his re-election in 1972. His obsession with silencing his opposition led to the creation of the infamous "Plumbers" who broke into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office and later, were caught bugging the Democratic Headquarters in the Watergate Hotel. The relentless pressure and well-crafted strategy constantly emerging out of the peace movement pushed Nixon to eagerly move against them at any costs. When activist veterans like Tom Hayden credited the downfall of Nixon to a successful

Vietnam peace movement, the lineage of events and characteristic flaws that motivated Nixon to act illegally supported his claims.

Another direct link between Nixon's downfall and the peace movement was the VVAW's connection in the bigger picture of the Watergate scandal. As the illegal break-ins at the Watergate Hotel began to garner more attention from the media the trail of people involved quickly wound back to the elite policy-makers within the White House. When James McCord, one of the Cubans tied to the break-in, testified in January, 1973, he stated the motivation for the bugging was the fear of the Democratic Party conspiring to overthrow the two-party governmental structure with radical, peace organizations; the VVAW was the only organization mentioned by name, thus, making the veteran's peace organization the government's defense.<sup>365</sup> For those involved in defending the veterans in the Gainesville Eight conspiracy trial, especially Morty Stavis, it became clear that the trumped up and preposterous charges issued by the Federal government were connected to the Watergate cover-up.<sup>366</sup> As popular history has illustrated, Nixon was ousted from the White House in the aftermath of his involvement in the break-in and cover-up of the Watergate scandal. On a lesser-known scale, the veterans charged in the Gainesville Eight trial found themselves acquitted of all the government's charges.

However, their victory was a double-edged sword. Although the men walked away from the court room free men, none of them participated in the VVAW after the summer of 1973; although the organization backed the defendants, the money fundraised to pay for their defense team created further divisions among the leaders of the VVAW

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<sup>365</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 264.

<sup>366</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 265.

and the extensive trial process “had ‘broken the back of the organization.’”<sup>367</sup> The narrative was all too familiar to many activists present during the reign of Nixon who felt their ultimate sacrifice, even at the achievement of removing the tyrant who perpetrated the war crimes in Indochina throughout the early 1970s, was the loss of their political identities and the destruction of their organizations.

The final score was one of victory for the New Left and combusted peace movement. They had spent years of constant resistance in attempts to end all funding of the war and military involvement in Southeast Asia. Their actions created results. Nixon implemented the best possible strategy, often less powerful or harmful than his original vision, that could uphold his reputation of victorious American president during wartime and protect his job for another four years. They opened the eyes of weary Americans, sick of seeing the war on their television screens and experiencing the turmoil generating from college campuses and anti war demonstrations. They held accountable the congressional members and inspired those who agreed with their mission statement to relentlessly force through legislation that put further restraints on the man in the White House. Nixon, a weathered politician and rich in experience on how to manipulate foreign policy to his own benefit, challenged the movement at every turn with secret bombing raids, continual military escalation with covert and public operations, and utilized his resources inside the defense and surveillance departments to undermine the oppositional threat the movement presented to the president. Despite their best efforts, he was able to continue the war, using almost every military strategy as his disposal – excluding the nuclear bomb – to find what appeared at face value to be an honorable

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<sup>367</sup> Nicosia, *Home to War*, 281-282.

conclusion and lasting peace in Vietnam. But the repercussions of the president's actions when he handled the upheaval from the New Left ultimately ended his career and further funding to the military American aftermath in Indochina. His ability to wield power through illegal break-ins and other "black bag" jobs were exposed to a maturing society, no longer ignorantly believing their government's assertions and craving a level of transparency in federal politics that had been nonexistent throughout the Vietnam conflict. The battle was long, tedious and often times unrewarding for the men and women who fought to end the war in Vietnam. Their activism throughout the final four years of war under Nixon had impacted his foreign policy in varied degrees and despite year after year of unending war, their influence created hysteria and paranoia that eventually shocked the foundation of the presidency. Although their defiance still resulted in Nixon and Kissinger finding their best version to end the war in Vietnam, their tactics permanently dethroned the last American president to participate in the bloodshed throughout Indochina, and severing the final stages of the conflict in Vietnam.

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