

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.



Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600



**A Republican Dove: George Aiken in the Johnson Years, 1964-1968**

**Miles DeNora**

**A Thesis**

**In**

**The Department**

**of**

**History**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**April 1999**

**© Miles DeNora, 1999**



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39046-2



## ABSTRACT

A Republican Dove: George Aiken in the Johnson Years, 1964-1968

Miles DeNora

This study is an examination of the Vietnam War dissent offered by Republican Senator George Aiken of Vermont during the years of the Lyndon Johnson Presidency. Emphasis is placed on analyzing the level of influence Aiken's criticisms had on American policy in Vietnam. Aiken's influence on his fellow Senators, particularly his Republican colleagues, is examined, as is the question of whether Aiken's dissent played a role in reducing the intensity of the conflict. The study explores in detail the individual years from 1964 to 1968, the particular debates concerning the war raised among Senators in each of these years and the role that Aiken played in these debates. The study also examines the nature of Aiken's dissent and its relation to that offered by other Senators, both Republican and Democrat. Aiken's position as a Republican is shown to have given a bipartisan character to anti-war dissent in the Senate: this was vital in providing such dissent with an added level of legitimacy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Stephen Scheinberg for his guidance and patience all these years.

I would also like to thank the staff at the Library Research Annex at the University of Vermont for their help in sifting through the voluminous Aiken Papers. Thanks to the staff at the inter-library loans office at the Vanier Library of Concordia University for their generous help in tracking down rare and not-so-rare works.

A thank you also goes out to Bob for helping ease the pain of staring at my computer screen.

Finally, a special thank you to Marianne for all her love, support and help, as well as her chocolate pudding.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction	1
Chapter One. George Aiken: A Man of Honour	10
Chapter Two. The Storm Gathers	30
Chapter Three. The United States Goes To War	52
Chapter Four. Aiken Visits South Vietnam	97
Chapter Five. Aiken's Plan For Peace	124
Chapter Six. An Irrevocable Split With LBJ	145
Chapter Seven. Ballot Box Dissent	187
Conclusion	214
Bibliography	220
Appendix	228

## INTRODUCTION

On November 22, 1963, upon the death of President John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson became the thirty-sixth President of the United States. On that day, American forces in Vietnam totaled less than 20,000. By the time Johnson left office in January 1969, there were more than 500,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Vietnam. While American troops fought a war in Southeast Asia, the President waged a battle with members of the United States Senate over the direction of American policy in Vietnam and the larger question of the primacy of the executive branch in foreign policy decision making. Initially, few dissenting voices were raised in the Senate regarding Johnson's actions in Vietnam. As the war expanded, however, more and more Senators voiced their displeasure with the war. Tragically, the expanding chorus of dissension emanating from the Senate had little effect on U.S. policymaking as the Johnson administration continued to act with impunity in Vietnam decision making. The Vietnam War was a defining event in American history, and the repercussions on the American psyche and government decision making are still being felt twenty-five years after U.S. involvement in the war ended. The war has also inspired a vast and flourishing historical literature. The main focus of the overwhelming majority of these works has been, and remains, the inner workings of Lyndon Johnson's White House. Only in the last ten years have works emerged that have focused on the level of dissent present in American society during the conflict. Few of these studies, however, have examined the effects of congressional dissent in any great detail.

Republican George Aiken of Vermont was one of the first members of the Senate to voice his disapproval with the direction of American policy in Vietnam. Aiken made clear his displeasure as early as 1964 and continued to speak out against Johnson's policies throughout the life of the Administration. Aiken was not alone in his dissent: by 1965 a number of Senators had spoken out against the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam, most notably William Fulbright of Arkansas, Mike Mansfield of Montana, Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska. Among Republican Senators, however, only John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky joined Aiken in expressing dismay over the ever-expanding nature of the conflict. For the most part, Republican criticism of Johnson's Vietnam policies had revolved around the

idea that the United States was not pursuing victory in Southeast Asia aggressively enough.<sup>1</sup> The 1964 Republican presidential nomination fight illustrated this as the conservative wing of the party, represented by Barry Goldwater, and the more moderate wing, represented by Nelson Rockefeller, united in criticizing Johnson's conduct of the war as too passive. The 1964 Republican policy platform blasted the administration for placing limits on American troops and by extension the country's ability and willingness to combat communism in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Aiken's pleas for restraint in Vietnam were voiced in opposition to many of the beliefs of his Republican colleagues. While in recent years a number of works have appeared focusing on the lives of some of the Senate's leading dissenters, all of the Senators studied have been Democrats.<sup>3</sup> Albeit few in number, the Republican dissenters played an important role that has not been examined in detail.

In a historiographical sense, the literature on the Vietnam War can be divided into three phases.<sup>4</sup> The first, an orthodox or contemporary phase, produced works that were highly critical of American involvement in the conflict.<sup>5</sup> The second, a revisionist phase, emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a group of writers produced numerous works offering a justification for U.S. policy.<sup>6</sup> The third and present phase has produced works of a post-revisionist nature.<sup>7</sup> These post-revisionist works have combined elements of the first two phases but have generally been more critical of American policy than the

<sup>1</sup> According to Walter Zelman, by March 1, 1966, fifteen Senators had spoken out publicly against American policy in Vietnam. Of those, thirteen were Democrats. They included Morse, Fulbright, Mansfield and Gruening as well as Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, Stephen M. Young of Ohio, George McGovern of South Dakota, Frank Church of Idaho, Albert Gore of Tennessee, Vance Hartke of Indiana, Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, Robert Kennedy of New York and Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania. Aiken and Cooper were the only two Republicans included in this list. Walter A. Zelman, *Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971), pp. 125-133.

<sup>2</sup> Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen summed up the mainstream Republican view in early 1964. Dirksen said, "It is high time our Government recognized that Communist aggression never stops and never will until we formulate policies to meet the realities presented by a cold, relentless, and inhuman enemy." Quoted in David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore and London, 1991), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> These include Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer's study of Frank Church, *Fighting the Odds: The Life Of Frank Church* (1994), Randall Bennett Woods's *Fulbright: A Biography* (1995), Gregory Allen Olson's *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study In Rhetorical Adaptation* (1995) and Mason Drukman's *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography* (1997).

<sup>4</sup> The historiography of Vietnam has been examined many times over the last twenty years. For the purposes of this introductory essay, two studies have been utilized: Robert A. Divine, "Vietnam Reconsidered," *Diplomatic History* 12 (Winter, 1988): 79-93, and Gary R. Hess, "The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History* 18 (Summer, 1994): 239-264.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of this phase include David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, 1972); Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston, 1972); and George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1986). Divine places Herring among works of the orthodox period while Hess puts him among the post revisionist works. Herring's work is unique among those studied in that although it was first published in 1979, the author made significant additions upon its second printing in 1986. For this reason, the work can be placed in either category.

<sup>6</sup> Among the works in this phase are Timothy J. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost-And Won: America's Intervention In Vietnam's Twin Struggles* (Baton Rouge and London, 1984); Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, California, 1982); and Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam At War. The History: 1946-1975* (Novato, California, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Examples of this phase include Larry Berman, *Planning A Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York and London, 1982), and Lyndon Johnson's War: *The Road To Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York and London, 1989); Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago and London, 1985); and Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, 1983).

revisionist studies. The issue of popular dissent was largely ignored by orthodox and revisionist writers but has come under increasing scrutiny during the post-revisionist period.<sup>8</sup> The effect of congressional dissent, however, has continued to be left largely unexamined in these later general works.<sup>9</sup>

During the orthodox phase of Vietnam historiography, in those works that gained a wide readership, the issue of congressional dissent was bypassed almost entirely.<sup>10</sup> The only work to deal broadly with congressional dissent during the contemporary phase of Vietnam historiography is Walter A. Zelman's *Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968*. Zelman's work, a Ph.D. dissertation in political science written while at the University of California at Los Angeles, did not, obviously, receive a wide readership. However, it remains a valuable study of Senate attitudes during the Vietnam War largely because the author interviewed twenty-five current and former Senators and thirty-nine Senatorial assistants in 1969, during the midst of the congressional debate on the validity of U.S. policy in Vietnam. As a result, Zelman effectively chronicles the views and motivations of many anti-war Senators and cogently separates the Senate dissenters by the timing and level of their criticism.<sup>11</sup> Zelman presciently foresaw the congressional effort to reassert a legislative role in foreign policy in the early 1970s.<sup>12</sup> More representative of this time are works such as David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*, which emphasizes the arrogance of presidential advisers such as McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, men that despite good intentions, had pushed the United States into a misguided and unwinnable war. Frances Fitzgerald's *Fire In The Lake* echoes Halberstam's conclusions, stressing as well that mindless anti-communism had led these advisers to

<sup>8</sup> Studies of popular dissent include Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick and London, 1988); Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, 1990); and David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore and London, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> William Conrad Gibbons has undertaken a five-volume study of U.S. government policy-making during the thirty-year American involvement in Vietnam. Four volumes have been published so far. Part I covered the period 1945-1960, Part II the period of 1961-1964, Part III the January-July 1965 period and Part IV the period from July 1965 to January 1968. The last volume is slated to cover the period from January 1968 to May 1975. Although the works are an exhaustive and meticulously researched study of the roles of both the executive and legislative branches of government, they are not critical examinations. The works are designed to be a nonpolitical, nonpartisan approach to studying the war's impact on the U.S. government. As Gibbons writes, "the purpose of the study is not to judge or to assess responsibility, but it does seek to locate responsibility, to describe roles, and to examine attitudes and assumptions." William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part I: 1945-1960* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1986), vii.

<sup>10</sup> Although all of the initial works on Vietnam shared a belief that United States policy was seriously misguided, Divine highlights three distinct views within this consensus. He labels the first the liberal internationalist perspective. This view claims that U.S. involvement in the war was the result of accidental, incremental steps. This theory excuses American leaders of any real responsibility for the tragedy of Vietnam. Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* exemplifies this view. The second distinct theme rejects the first thesis, instead arguing that U.S. presidents had taken a series of steps knowing full well that none of them were likely to achieve the desired result. Divine labels this view, which placed the onus of blame on the presidents and excused the advisers, the stalemate concept. Perhaps the best representation of this theory is Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C., 1979). The third view outlined by Divine claims that the entire postwar containment policy was flawed and Vietnam was simply the ultimate culmination of a misguided and overly aggressive U.S. effort to contain communism. Divine lists Herring's *America's Longest War* as the most balanced study of the containment thesis. Divine, pp. 81-84.

<sup>11</sup> Walter A. Zelman, *Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968* (Los Angeles, 1971), pp. 125-130.

<sup>12</sup> Zelman, p. 338.

ignore Vietnamese politics, history and culture. Gelb and Betts's *The Irony of Vietnam* focuses entirely on the decision making processes of the Johnson administration, leaving the role of Congress completely unexamined.<sup>13</sup> Only George Herring's *America At War* studies the effects of the anti-war movement. Herring contends that the movement did not turn the American people against the war. It had more of a subtle effect, forcing Vietnam onto the public consciousness, leading eventually to fatigue and anxiety among both the public and administration officials.<sup>14</sup> Although Herring included sections on the anti-war movement, he ignores congressional dissent during the Johnson years. The 1966 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on the war merit only a single sentence in the text. The congressional role during the Nixon administration is examined more closely, but the Johnson years are devoid of a serious study of the effect of congressional dissent.

Like their orthodox counterparts, revisionist writers were generally unconcerned about examining congressional dissent. Harry Summers devotes a chapter of his book *On Strategy* to the congressional role, but the discussion is solely dedicated to the question of whether the Johnson administration should have asked Congress for a declaration of war. Summers decries the lack of such a declaration as a key strategic error, one that prevented the American people from coalescing around a clear and unmistakable goal, the defeat of North Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> Lomperis avoids any discussion of congressional dissent, focusing entirely on the notion that the United States could have achieved a military victory if different tactics had been employed. Davidson, meanwhile, mentions Congress only as it relates to the period following the withdrawal of American forces in 1973. He puts the blame for the collapse of South Vietnam on Congress and its refusal to provide adequate funding for the government in Saigon.<sup>16</sup> These three works are representative of revisionist writings, writings whose main goal was defending and justifying American intervention in Vietnam.

---

<sup>13</sup> Studies such as that offered by Gelb and Betts were informed to a great extent by the publication in 1971 of the Pentagon Papers, a massive study of American policy making from 1945 to 1967, assembled by the Department of Defense. The classified documents made it clear that Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were well aware that the decisions they approved for Vietnam would not gain a victory but were merely forestalling defeat, hence the stalemate concept. Divine, pp. 79-80.

<sup>14</sup> Herring, p. 173.

<sup>15</sup> Summers lays the blame for this mistake at the door of the White House, writing "when the President could have had it (a declaration of war) he didn't think he needed it, and when he needed it he couldn't have it." Summers, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Davidson is particularly vociferous in his criticism of Congress. In reference to what he labels an anti-war propaganda campaign initiated in North Vietnam and the United States, Davidson writes, "the congressional executioners of South Vietnam didn't need or want any help from North Vietnam in destroying the Republic of South Vietnam." Davidson, pp. 671-672.

Recent post-revisionist writers have begun to examine the role of Congress and the effect of congressional dissent on the administration and the American public. Initially, however, post-revisionist authors continued to confine their examinations of Vietnam to policy making in the Johnson administration.<sup>17</sup> Larry Berman's works, *Planning A Tragedy* and *Lyndon Johnson's War*, do not mention the role of Congress in any way. Kathleen Turner's *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, an analysis of the Johnson administration's emerging credibility gap, studies the President's inability to appease both hawks and doves. Turner makes mention of congressional dissent, specifically the SFRC hearings. She credits the hearings with helping to legitimize criticism of the war and with sharpening the differences between those who wanted peace in Vietnam and those who wanted to achieve victory on the battlefield. Turner contends that in response to the hearings, the administration accelerated its efforts to present its message aggressively to the press and the public. As a result, the SFRC hearings indirectly helped to widen the credibility gap, a situation that eventually led to Johnson's downfall.<sup>18</sup> Turner's examination of congressional dissent, while more extensive than that offered by earlier writers, focused mainly on the SFRC hearings and the role played by its Chairman, William Fulbright. This trend would continue even in those works focusing on the anti-war movement.

It is only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that studies of the anti-war movement began to appear. These works echoed Turner's conclusions regarding the SFRC hearings. In *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, Melvin Small concludes that the anti-war movement had an indirect but significant impact, playing a role in Johnson's decision to resign and Nixon's reluctance to re-escalate the conflict in 1973. The greatest success of the movement, according to Small, lay in the fact that more Americans became uncomfortable with the nation's involvement in Vietnam, and many were convinced to oppose the war. Small writes that the hearings "probably had some cumulative long-term effect since, for the first time, aside from the June 1965 teach-in, reasoned dissent obtained a platform on national network television and seemed respectable."<sup>19</sup> Other than this analysis of the SFRC hearings, however, congressional dissent is given short shrift in Small's work. This pattern is repeated in Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Catfield's *An American Ordeal*, an exhaustive and wide ranging exploration of the anti-war movement. While the study focuses on many

---

<sup>17</sup> The reexamination of the Johnson administration can be ascribed to the vast number of documents that became available to scholars during this period.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, pp. 156-157.

<sup>19</sup> Small, p. 80.



disparate aspects of the movement, including students, the elite, trade unions, women's groups and religious organizations, the role of Congress is largely left untouched.<sup>20</sup> As in Small, DeBenedetti and Catfield's analysis of congressional dissent focuses almost entirely on the role of the 1966 SFRC hearings, the authors write that the hearings opened "ambiguities, contradictions, and uncertainties of administration policy to deliberative review and lent legitimacy to dissent."<sup>21</sup> David Levy echoes the conclusions presented in these two works regarding the SFRC hearings. Levy claims that the witnesses called by the Foreign Relations Committee, General James Gavin and George Kennan, helped the anti-war movement because "their immense prestige and obvious authority lent a new respectability to criticism of the war and seemed to provide a clear, moderate, and honorable alternative to American policy."<sup>22</sup> Although these works give congressional dissent a cursory examination at best, their importance lies in the fact that the American home front had finally become a focus of the history being written on the Vietnam War.<sup>23</sup> An examination of congressional dissent was obviously lacking in these studies and in response, the latter half of the 1990s has seen the emergence of a number of works focusing on leading Senate critics of the war.

The first of these works to appear was Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer's *Fighting The Odds: The Life of Frank Church*. In what Ashby and Gramer refer to as "Lyndon relations", Democrat Frank Church of Idaho struggled to remain on cordial terms with the White House during Johnson's tenure. As a firm supporter of Johnson's domestic goals, Church continued to vote for White House programs while at the same time criticizing the President's Vietnam policies. Church remained a pragmatist throughout his time in the Senate, concerned with having an impact on final legislation. Church's opposition to the Vietnam War, therefore, was a difficult stance for the Senator to take as it put him at odds with a great many of his colleagues.<sup>24</sup> The authors detail the quandary that congressional doves found themselves in during the war, trying to advocate withdrawal without appearing weak, and trying to find a peaceful solution to the crisis

---

<sup>20</sup> The authors conclude that the movement's main achievements lay in exerting pressure on the Johnson and Nixon administrations, thereby constraining their actions, and in presenting the prospect of defeat to the general public. Defeat in Vietnam was discussed in a public forum as an option throughout the period and a majority of the American people finally withdrew support for the war as they finally rejected the goal of military victory as meaningful. DeBenedetti and Chatfield, pp. 398-407.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> Levy, p. 136. Levy concludes that although the movement had an effect on public opinion, the greatest factor in rising discontent with the war was war-weariness combined with the surprise and shock of the Tet offensive.

<sup>23</sup> Following the reassessment of the Johnson administration of the late 1980s, works on Vietnam evolved into a current of specialist studies. Analysis of the anti-war movement is one aspect of this trend. An exception to this trend is Lloyd C. Gardner's *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago, 1995). Gardner's largely sympathetic portrait of Johnson once again revisits White House decision making during the Johnson years.

<sup>24</sup> Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting The Odds: The Life of Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), p. xiv.

without placing American military personnel at risk. Church's opposition to the war eventually evolved into an overall reassessment of the place of the United States in the world.<sup>25</sup> As detailed in Randall Bennett Woods's *Fulbright: A Biography*, William Fulbright shared Church's doubts about the direction of United States foreign policy in the 1960 and 1970s.<sup>26</sup> The study traces Fulbright's evolution from a liberal internationalist and strong advocate of executive leadership in foreign affairs to a strident critic of American intervention in Latin America and Southeast Asia and strong supporter of congressional efforts to reassert its rightful constitutional place in foreign affairs. Fulbright's greatest contribution to the anti-war movement, according to Woods, lay in providing a forum for mainstream and respected dissent by transforming the Foreign Relations Committee into a bastion of Senate anti-war sentiment.<sup>27</sup> Fulbright's influence on the Johnson administration was limited, however, because the Senate Democrat was essentially frozen out by the President following his break with White House policy. Although the Arkansan held the powerful position of chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Johnson did not need or expect Fulbright to play a leading role in the passage of the Administration's domestic program. As a result, the President could afford to virtually ignore Fulbright's advice.

Mike Mansfield shared Fulbright's conversion from cold warrior to critic of American involvement in Vietnam. Gregory Allen Olson's *Mansfield: A Study In Rhetorical Adaptation* traces Mansfield's conversion from firm supporter of American efforts in Vietnam during the 1950s to private doubter during the Kennedy and Johnson administration and eventually to full blown Senate critic during the Nixon administration. Ultimately, Mansfield's dissent during the Johnson years fell on deaf ears as the Montana Democrat refused to publicly break with his old Senate colleague and party leader. Mansfield refused to organize a coherent Senate opposition to the war during Johnson's years in the White House, believing instead that he could more effectively influence the administration if he kept his dissent private.<sup>28</sup> Mansfield deluged the White House with a veritable shelf full of memos detailing his firm opposition to the direction of the Vietnam War. In an attempt to maintain cordial relations with a man he needed to pass his

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213. Church was not an isolationist but he criticized the growing preeminence of executive power in foreign affairs.

<sup>26</sup> Among congressional critics of the war, only Fulbright's role had been analyzed at length during the 1980s. Lee Riley Powell's *J. William Fulbright and America's Lost Crusade: Fulbright's Opposition to the Vietnam War* (Little Rock, 1984) and William C. Berman's *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist* (Kent, Ohio, 1988) treated the Arkansas Democrat's view on Vietnam to an extended examination.

<sup>27</sup> Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York, 1995), pp. 460-462.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory Allen Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study In Rhetorical Adaptation* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1995), pp. 195-196.

Great Society legislation. Johnson directed his aides to answer Mansfield's memos with careful rebuttals designed to assuage the Montana Democrat's concerns but the President, for all intents and purposes, refused to heed Mansfield's advice. In Mason Drukman's *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography*, the issue of Vietnam is not as prevalent as it is in the three previous works. The reason for this is simple; Democrat Wayne Morse is remembered almost solely for his opposition to the Vietnam War, and Drukman wanted to change this by painting a fuller portrait of the Oregon Senator.<sup>29</sup> Remarkably, for all of Wayne Morse's vitriolic rhetoric aimed at the White House, the Oregon Democrat maintained a genial relationship with Johnson, as long as the two avoided discussing Vietnam. Drukman's biography reveals that Morse played a key role in insuring passage of many of Johnson's education programs. Johnson was also well aware of Morse's reputation as a Senate gadfly, one whose views on the war were for the most part ignored by his colleagues. For these reasons, Johnson believed that he could ignore Morse's pleas concerning Vietnam while continuing to use him to aid in the passage of his domestic program.

These four biographies help to illustrate the level and character of anti-war dissent among Senate Democrats during the Johnson years. In order to arrive at a better understanding of Senate dissent, however, the views of Republican critics have to be examined. An analysis of George Aiken's views on the Vietnam War during Lyndon Johnson's presidency is illuminating in two ways: as an example of Republican dissent and as a case of moderate, restrained criticism. Mike Mansfield's characterization of Aiken as a "wise old owl" correctly sets Aiken apart from his Senate colleagues. Although Aiken was certainly not as biting in his criticism of the Johnson administration as colleagues such as William Fulbright and Wayne Morse, his dissatisfaction with the White House certainly increased during Johnson's years in office. The evolution of Aiken's dissent, from restrained and measured dissent in 1964 and 1965 to increasingly bitter and acerbic criticism by 1967 and 1968, illustrates the path followed by many of his fellow Senators. Aiken's critique of U.S. policy in Vietnam is closer to that of his good friend Mike Mansfield than that of Morse or Fulbright but his Republicanism sets him apart from the Montana Democrat as well. As the earliest, and at times most vocal Republican critic of the Johnson administration, Aiken's role takes on added importance in arriving at a more well-rounded view of Congressional dissent during the 1960s. Aiken helped pave the way for Republicans like Thurston Morton of Kentucky, Jacob Javits of New York and Charles Percy of

---

<sup>29</sup> Mason Drukman, *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography* (Portland, Oregon, 1997), pp. 6-7.

Illinois, who gave Senate dissent a bipartisan character and helped to legitimize it in the eyes of many Americans. An examination of Aiken's dissent, therefore, can serve as an addition to the literature on the Vietnam War.

This study examines Aiken's views on the Vietnam War only during the years that Lyndon Johnson occupied the White House. Aiken's position on Vietnam changed when Richard Nixon won the Presidency in 1968. Aiken offered Nixon substantial support because he agreed with the Republican President's policy of "Vietnamization" and phased withdrawal of American forces. Aiken believed that these Nixon administration policies matched ideas that he offered in 1966, namely that the war would slowly fade away as the U.S. very gradually removed its forces while offering extensive military and economic aid to the government in Saigon. As a result, Aiken only offered vigorous criticism of American policy in Vietnam during the Johnson years. Aiken continued to question some U.S. policies during Nixon's time in the White House, most notably the Cambodian invasion of 1970 and the Christmas bombings of 1972, but his role as a leading Senate dissenter ceased upon Richard Nixon's election.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *George Aiken: A Man of Honour*

In 1974, George David Aiken retired at age 82 from the United States Senate. His political career spanned a period of forty-four years. Aiken's political offices included Vermont State legislator, speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives, Lieutenant Governor, Governor and finally United States Senator, a position he occupied for thirty-four years.<sup>1</sup> By the time he declined to seek reelection for a seventh term, in February, 1974, Aiken had seen two Presidents die in office, two decline to seek election to second terms and one resign in disgrace. He had been present for three major wars, the dawning of the nuclear age, and the Cold War. Upon learning of Aiken's decision to return to his beloved state of Vermont, Mike Mansfield, the Majority Leader of the Senate, described him as a "man of outstanding integrity and unquestioned patriotism" as well as "a man of independence."<sup>2</sup> A man of solid convictions, Aiken was popular with his constituents, highly respected by his peers, and clearly devoted to both his state and country.

George Aiken was born in Dummerston, Vermont on August 20, 1892. He grew up on a farm in Putney, helping out with maintaining the farm throughout his teens. He finished high school but his educational pursuits stopped there. By the time of the First World War, Aiken had begun working in the nursery business, growing berry plants and trees for later transplantation. This was the genesis of a lifelong passion for plants, leading to the publication in 1935 of Aiken's book, *Pioneering With Wild Flowers*. He remained in the nursery business until his election as Governor of Vermont in 1936. He had married Beatrice M. Howard in 1914 and by the time the United States entered the war, the couple had two children. As Aiken recalled it, he felt that the obligations of caring for his new family and seeing that his nursery business was well run convinced him that enlisting in the army was not an option for him. He registered but was never called to serve.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> William Doyle, *The Vermont Political Tradition: And Those Who Helped Make It* (Barre, Vermont, 1984), p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2d Sess., p. 1650.

<sup>3</sup> Charles T. Morrissey and D. Gregory Sanford, *That Man From Vermont - George David Aiken, An Oral History Memoir* (Burlington, Vermont, 1981), p. 19.

Aiken first dabbled with politics in 1922 when he ran, on the Republican ticket, for the Vermont State House as a representative for a district that included the town of Putney. According to Aiken himself, each generation of his family, as far back as the 1770s, had sent someone to the legislature. Aiken's father had been elected in 1912 as a Bull Moose Republican, winning reelection three times.<sup>4</sup> Electoral politics, therefore, was a natural avenue for Aiken to travel. Unfortunately for him, his first effort was unsuccessful. He lost, in an extremely close race, to Democrat Fred Leach. This was a rare occurrence as Vermont was a rock solid Republican state; in fact Leach was the first Democratic representative in Putney's history.

The domination of the Republican Party in Vermont can be traced all the way back to the pre-civil war era. The Democratic Party was considerably weakened in 1839 by defections of its anti-slavery members to the Liberal Party. The issue of slavery destroyed the other major political party in Vermont, the Whigs, in the 1850s. The Whigs were torn apart as political bonds in the state were snapped as abolitionists forced the issue onto center stage. The Democrats, however, were unable to capitalize on this situation because the Republican Party stepped into this political vacuum. In 1858 Hiland Hall was elected as the first Republican Governor of Vermont by a plurality of 16,000 votes, a substantial amount at the time.<sup>5</sup> The Republicans did not lose a race for the Governor's Mansion until over a century later.

Vermont's rabid anti-slavery bent was revealed clearly during the Presidential election of 1860 when a native Vermonter but Illinois resident, Stephen Douglas, was defeated in his home state by a four to one margin by the relatively unknown Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. Lincoln's identification as an antislavery Republican was enough for Vermonters to vote for him in droves. The state's antislavery sentiments drove the men of Vermont to enlist in huge numbers to the Union army, roughly half of the able bodied men signed up. Vermont lost more men, relatively, than any other northern state. It was also the only state that had a brigade named after it. The Second Vermont Brigade suffered a 40 percent casualty loss during the course of the war.<sup>6</sup> Her total commitment to the Union cause was the foundation upon which Republican domination of Vermont was built.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Frank M. Bryan, *Yankee Politics In Rural Vermont* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1930 this Republican command of the state's politics served Aiken well in his second bid for election as a Putney representative. After winning the Republican nomination Aiken was assured of winning because the Democrats did not even attempt to field a candidate that year. Aiken quickly made a name for himself by championing the opposition to a massive flood control proposal that would have allowed private utility companies to build storage reservoirs for the purpose of generating hydroelectric power at dam sites throughout the state. The defeat of the bill was also directly responsible for the end of the political career of the House speaker, Ed Deavitt, its chief sponsor. After the speaker's defeat in the 1932 elections Aiken, now in a position of prominence, ran for and won the position himself. Continuing his rapid rise to political prominence Aiken won the Lieutenant governorship in 1934. Then in 1936, Vermont's Governor, Charles Smith, decided not to run for a second term and Aiken capitalized on this opportunity and was elected Governor.

1936 once again proved that Vermont was a thoroughly Republican state. Franklin Roosevelt was overwhelmingly reelected President of the United States. Vermont joined Maine as the only two states to vote against the incumbent President. Aiken was one of only four Republicans to be elected Governor that year. As a result, he garnered a great deal of attention from the national press. Aiken shrewdly supported parts of the New Deal that provided Vermont with substantial benefits such as Social Security while at the same time criticizing Roosevelt for overextending, in his view, the reach of the federal government. Aiken was unwilling to oppose New Deal measures simply because they were proposals initiated by a Democratic administration. He vigorously criticized Republicans who without hesitation voiced their disapproval of Roosevelt's programs. He said that he would refuse to reject "any measure calculated to relieve human distress simply because those measures are endorsed by an opposing party."<sup>7</sup> During his administration he remained sympathetic to many measures proposed by the federal government, taking advantage of federal largesse when it suited Vermont's needs while at the same time opposing measures that he felt would be damaging to his state.

Foremost among the New Deal measures which he fought against was a Roosevelt proposal to

---

<sup>7</sup> Michael Sherman ed., *The Political Legacy Of George Aiken: Wise Old Owl of the U.S. Senate* (Woodstock, Vermont, 1995), p. 16.

construct a Connecticut River Valley Authority modeled after the Tennessee Valley Authority. Aiken was horrified at the thought of federal authorities flooding his beloved hill farm country in order to produce electricity for the southern cities of New England. Aiken's steadfast opposition to this plan stemmed, in part, from his fear that Franklin Roosevelt was leading the U.S. government along a path that would result in increasing and dangerous levels of federal and executive power. While Aiken stressed the need for the Vermont government to protect the state's natural resources against federal encroachment, he also opposed plans by private utility companies to harness the state's energy capabilities. In an attempt to leave the earning potential of the state's natural resources in the hands of the state government he emphasized Vermont's ability to manage its affairs without the unwanted and overbearing impetus of the government in Washington. The battle against the massive hydro project won him praise from many Republicans nationwide, feeling as they did, adrift in a Democratic sea of political dominance. Aiken's increasingly high profile thrust him into the role of national party spokesman.<sup>8</sup>

Aiken's battle to protect Vermont from what he viewed as the dangerous consequences of the CRVA plan was an element of his attempt to project a more positive and compassionate form of Republicanism. Aiken called for Republicans to recognize the needs of the working class while accepting some levels of government activism on the federal and state level.<sup>9</sup> In an effort to change the character of the national Republican Party Aiken used the prominence gained from the battle over the CRVA to castigate not only the Roosevelt administration but also GOP leaders. He used a nationally broadcast Lincoln Day speech to rail against what he called "old guard" Republican party leaders who were, in his opinion, inexorably linked with corporate and moneyed interests. He began the address by stating that "The greatest praise that I can give Lincoln is to say that he would be ashamed of his party's leadership today."<sup>10</sup> The speech was the culmination of an effort by the publicity director of the Republican National Committee, Leo Casey, to organize an Aiken for President boomlet among rank and file Republicans. The Lincoln Day speech was, in fact, written and prepared for Aiken by Casey, one of the very few times in his political

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Doyle p. 188, and Sherman p. 17.



career that Aiken delivered a speech that he did not write.<sup>11</sup> Although such public pronouncements made Aiken popular among Republican Party regulars the party bosses did not appreciate this kind of biting criticism. As a result, the presidential aspirations of the Vermont Governor died an early and emphatic death. The Vermont Republican Party bosses were no more pleased with Aiken than their national counterparts, for this reason they organized to prevent Aiken from seeking a third term as Governor in 1940, taking the unprecedented step of endorsing a candidate a full year before the Republican primary was to take place.<sup>12</sup>

Aiken never had to face this challenge, however, because in June of 1940 Senator Ernest W. Gibson died, opening the way for Aiken to be elected to national office. Aiken appointed a close political ally, the son of the late Vermont representative, Ernest W. Gibson Jr. as interim Senator. After he declined to seek election Aiken declared his own candidacy, defeated Ralph Flanders in the Republican primary and easily won election to Washington.<sup>13</sup> It was the beginning of his uninterrupted thirty-four year tenure as a Senator from Vermont.

The unwavering loyalty that Vermont voters demonstrated to Aiken during his political career rested on his steadfast defense of the interests of his state. During his time in the senate, Aiken, as some of his critics claimed, had a blind spot for his home state. Although this did not by any means make Aiken unique among Senators, the needs of Vermont guided his actions on most major issues and framed his political interests to a large degree.<sup>14</sup> While these solid ties to Vermont led some to criticize him, it also, at the same time, helped to insure that the voters of the Green Mountain state remained committed to returning George Aiken to Washington as their Senator over the course of six elections. Aiken never received less than sixty percent of the vote and only once was elected with less than sixty-five percent support. In 1968 Aiken won the votes of all but 178 Vermonters out of a total of 156,375.<sup>15</sup> The Vermont Democratic Party often put up only token opposition but in 1968 they went one step further and nominated Aiken on their ticket as well. Aiken's most strident opposition often came not from the Democrats but

---

<sup>11</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Sherman, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Doyle, p. 188, and Sherman p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Jon Herbers, "Occupation: Farmer, Avocation: Senator," *The New York Times Magazine*, (January 29, 1967), pp.32-33.

<sup>15</sup> Christie Carter ed., *Vermont Elections 1789-1989* (Montpelier, Vermont, 1989), p. 161.

from within his own party. The conservative wing of the Vermont Republican Party was often unhappy with Aiken for the stands he took, to the point when in 1961 Franklin B. Smith, a columnist for the conservative *Burlington Free Press*, wrote that "Aiken and other 'pseudo-Republicans' should form their own political party and have the courage to call it the semi-socialist party."<sup>16</sup>

At various times in his career Aiken was labeled a moderate or a liberal but he preferred the term progressive. Aiken grew up in the time of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the two great progressive presidents of the early twentieth century. Vermont was not immune to the influence of the progressivism sweeping the nation during this era. Aiken followed in the footsteps of his father, a genuine Roosevelt Bull Moose. During his time as Governor, Aiken carved out a reputation as one of the most progressive leaders in Vermont history and made enemies in the granite industry, the marble industry, the railroads, banks, and the insurance industry.<sup>17</sup> Although Aiken recognized that these industries constituted an essential element of Vermont's economy, he often took issue with them if he felt that the state's best interests were threatened or when he believed that Vermont workers were being exploited or abused. Aiken carried these progressive ideals with him to the Senate, demonstrating time and again that they formed an important basis of his beliefs.

Aiken was guided by a pragmatic belief that perfect solutions to problems did not exist. He was perfectly willing to throw his support to bills that he believed were troublesome in some areas but were in the main positive because he felt that weaknesses could be corrected at a later date. Wedded to this practice was Aiken's role as a staunch Republican Party man. He voted consistently with his party, even when he disagreed with his party's ideas. The Taft-Hartley Act illustrates this very well. Even though Aiken fought against many of its provisions in committee, he voted for the bill itself and the override of President Truman's veto. Aiken trusted Robert Taft's promise that if problems arose with the bill, changes would subsequently be made and that he would be consulted. Aiken believed that he could wield more influence in party circles if he remained loyal, a stance that led him to vote for bills that he didn't necessarily believe in completely.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Sherman, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Sherman, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 121, and Sherman, p. 38.

Loyalty to his party did not, however, mean that Aiken blindly followed Republican initiatives or automatically voted against Democratic proposals. His 1938 Lincoln Day speech illustrates that Aiken was, at times, very critical of his party. The case of Joe McCarthy highlights the struggle that Aiken sometimes underwent in relation to his dual streams of independence and party loyalty. Aiken was one of only six senators to sign Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith's "Declaration of Conscience" in June 1950, the first critical statement made in the Senate directed at McCarthy. The document outlined basic principles that the signatories felt were being trampled upon including "the right to criticize, the right to hold unpopular beliefs, the right to protest and the right to independent thought."<sup>19</sup> Aiken continued to express his concern over the hysteria created by McCarthyism during the following four years. In 1954, when the Senate finally moved towards censuring McCarthy, Aiken struggled with his decision over whether or not to vote with the majority in reprimanding the Wisconsin Senator. This was an agonizing decision for most Republicans and Aiken, the loyal party man, was no exception. As he later said, "I finally had to vote to censure Joe. I didn't want to, I had to."<sup>20</sup> Even though he had spoken out against McCarthy and found his behaviour deplorable, it was not easy for Aiken to vote to censure a fellow Republican but in the end he did what he thought was right, regardless of party.

Aiken was also concerned about the growth of federal and in particular executive power during his time as Governor and he retained this concern throughout his political career. His first speech in the Senate dealt with his criticism of the Lend Lease Act. He supported aid to England but was gravely concerned about a particular proviso in the bill which he interpreted as giving the president full authority to commit the United States to agreements or treaties when the executive branch felt it was in the best interests of the country. Aiken was particularly disturbed by the fact that the president was not required to consult Congress when arranging these deals. Aiken described it as "perhaps the biggest giveaway of congressional constitutional authority up to that time."<sup>21</sup> For this reason Aiken voted against the bill. In his book *Aiken - Senate Diary, January 1972 - January 1975*, the Senator stressed his concern over the fact that Congress had done little to reclaim its Constitutional responsibility and authority. He wrote that

---

<sup>19</sup> Sherman, p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 127.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

he had "tried to make it plain that I would support all efforts of the Congress to recover Constitutional powers which have been taken away - or, in the early days, given away - to the executive branch" further lamenting the fact that the president had a "great deal of power and authority, some of which was not intended or contemplated by the framers of our Constitution and its amendments."<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Aiken was in agreement with Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. who detailed and criticized the rise of presidential power in *The Imperial Presidency*.<sup>23</sup> Aiken's concern over the expansion of executive power was demonstrated again during the debates over the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960. The Vermonter was worried about the proposed creation of the new office of assistant attorney general for civil rights; an office that Aiken felt would be endowed with ambiguously defined powers. Describing his reasons for joining the battle against the office Aiken said, "one of our greatest struggles is the fight against encroachment.... by the Federal Government to gain control over State, Community, and local affairs."<sup>24</sup> Aiken was not, however, against establishing greater protection against racial discrimination, as his support for the historic 1964 Civil Rights Bill demonstrates.

Aiken, in fact, played a key role in the passage of this bill. To voice their opposition, Republicans in the Senate used the idea that personal property rights were going to be trampled upon if the bill was passed in its original form. In order to circumvent this Aiken and others, principally Majority Leader Mansfield, created what became known as the Mrs. Murphy's boardinghouse compromise. President Kennedy called Aiken into the White House and the Senator told him that although the bill had many fine attributes, Republicans, in Aiken's words, "want you to leave Mrs. Murphy alone."<sup>25</sup> Aiken worked with fellow Senators Dirksen, Humphrey, Kuchel, Magnuson, Mansfield and Saltonstall together with Attorney General Robert Kennedy in fashioning a compromise that excluded establishments housing five or fewer individuals, such as Mrs. Murphy's fictional boardinghouse for school teachers, from the provisions of the

---

<sup>22</sup> George David Aiken, *Aiken: Senate Diary, January 1972 - January 1975* (Brattleboro, Vermont, 1976), p. 202.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston, 1973). In 1971, Aiken and Mansfield offered an amendment calling for a constitutional amendment limiting Presidents to a single six-year term. Schlesinger attacked the idea, writing that it increased presidential independence and removed the executive from being accountable to the American people. Aiken, however, saw the amendment as an attempt to, as he said, "permit the president to concentrate on running the White House, the executive branch of government, as he was constitutionally required to and not spend too much time looking towards the next election." Morrissey and Sanford, p. 191. The amendment was subjected to a hearing but never put to a vote.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Sherman, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 152.

Civil Rights Bill.<sup>26</sup> Aiken worked along with Republican leaders to convince some of his GOP colleagues that "Congress could simultaneously maintain traditional political rights and accomplish its larger objective of prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations on the basis of race."<sup>27</sup> Aiken's support for personal property rights was strong but he realized that the greater good could at times override this basic right. He shared Vermonters fervent belief that, as its constitution outlined, "property ought to be subservient to public uses when necessity requires it" but he balanced this belief by maintaining that government was required to uphold the other provision detailed in the Vermont constitution that stated that "whenever any person's property is taken for the use of the public, the owner ought to receive an equivalent of money."<sup>28</sup>

By the time Aiken retired from the Senate in 1974 he was one of the most respected members of that body. His major committee assignments included Agriculture and Forestry (1941-1975), Joint Committee on Atomic Energy (1959-1975), Labour and Public Welfare (1941-1954) and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (1954-1975). Aiken, in a move designed to block Senator Joe McCarthy from claiming a seat on the Foreign Relations Committee, gave up his seat on the Labour committee in 1954 to sit on the SFRC. Democratic Senators respected the Vermonter as much as his Republican colleagues. His Chairmanship of the Foreign Relations sub-committee on Canada, while a member of the minority party, serves as a testament to his appeal on both sides of the aisle. His popularity among his fellow Senators was ably demonstrated in 1965 when Senator Margaret Chase Smith organized a birthday party for Aiken which was attended by seventy of his colleagues as well as President Lyndon Johnson.<sup>29</sup> An article devoted to the fete which appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* commented that only a party for Aiken could have produced such a turnout among his peers because "few men in the Senate are as highly regarded, as beloved as the kindly charmer from Vermont."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Following a decisive meeting with key Senators on details concerning the Civil Rights Bill, Robert Kennedy told President Johnson in a telephone conversation that Aiken had been extremely helpful in fashioning a compromise. The Attorney General asked the President to call Aiken to express his gratitude for his help in reaching the agreement. Johnson Library, Recordings of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, Tape WH 6405.06, May 13, 1964.

<sup>27</sup> Sherman, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Sherman, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> In an interview, Stephen Terry, Aiken's legislative assistant from 1969 to 1975, used the attendance of President Johnson at this birthday party to illustrate the high regard in which Johnson held Aiken. Terry said that although the two men were not particularly close, they were friends nonetheless and had a good deal of respect for each other.

<sup>30</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 23057.

Aiken's appeal among his fellow Senators rested above all on his honesty and forthrightness. He was trusted by his colleagues as a man who did not seek to pontificate at the expense of other Senators. A man of few words, he avoided making highly partisan speeches. He was known for his dry wit, demonstrated at the 1965 birthday party when, upon receiving gifts from President Johnson, his former Senate colleague, he remarked that if the president would just listen to his advice he would be the best president the country ever had.<sup>31</sup> Aiken's closest friend and confidant was a Democrat, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. Mansfield and Aiken had breakfast together in the Senate cafeteria almost every morning the two were together in Washington for twenty-one years. Mansfield was one of the Senate's leading doves during the time of the Vietnam war and his considerable expertise as an Asia expert, gained in years teaching about southeast Asia before his election to the Senate, no doubt influenced Aiken's views on the war. According to staff aide Stephen Terry, Aiken and Mansfield had matching personalities, born from the fact that they both came from rural States and shared many of the same characteristics. Although Aiken did not follow Mansfield's lead on Vietnam, he shared many of the same views, views that were reinforced by the Senator from Montana.<sup>32</sup>

Historian Mark A. Stoler has written that the two men used their relationship in a way which was designed to shield them from political attack while enabling them to criticize the conflict in Vietnam. In 1965 the two Senators began attacking both the Johnson administration and Republican Congressional hawks who were calling for escalating the war. As the Democratic Majority Leader, Mansfield could not openly criticize a president of his own party but Aiken, as a leading Republican, could publicly denounce administration policy in language that Mansfield used in private correspondence with Lyndon Johnson. At the same time, Aiken had to limit his statements on his Republican colleagues to mild rebukes regarding their hawkish statements. Mansfield, however, was not so constrained and he used harsher language to criticize Republican hawks. Evidence of this special working strategy can be clearly seen when reading the *Congressional Record* from the period. Almost invariably, statements from each of the men would be followed by the other offering his support for what was just said. The two would then engage in a

---

<sup>31</sup> Lewis W. Wolfson, "George Aiken: He Prunes When The Saw Is Sharp," *The Rhode Islander* (August 6, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Terry, interview with the author, October 31, 1997.

conversation on the Senate floor wherein one would lob leading questions in the other's direction thereby giving each of them an opportunity to expand and explain their positions.

Aiken's close friendship with Mansfield served him well in the Senate. As one of his aides, Stephen Terry, has written, Aiken's influence in the Senate was not akin to that wielded by men such as Richard Russell or Lyndon Johnson. As a Republican Aiken was not chairman of any of the prestigious and powerful committees nor was he a member of the Senate leadership. According to Terry, Aiken's "influence was based on his personal integrity, his wit, and his friendship with Mansfield."<sup>33</sup> Mansfield and Aiken would discuss issues that were before the Senate; careful not to tell each other how they would vote on particular things. This friendship with the Majority Leader meant that Aiken was privy to all of the decisions regarding floor action in the Senate, which bills would come up for votes at what time.<sup>34</sup> The two often collaborated on bills, introducing joint resolutions. Outsiders were rarely allowed to join in on the conversations and when they did, according to Aiken, Mansfield would "clam up and not say a word."<sup>35</sup> Aiken's friendship meant that although he was not officially a member of the Senate leadership Mansfield consulted him as often if not more than any other member of the Senate.

At the time of his retirement Aiken was considered the dean of the Senate and one of its leading members. Although not a member of the Senate leadership his position as the senior Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meant that he was often included in high level meetings on the Vietnam War. His refusal to continually engage in partisan attacks, his stalwart party affiliation aside, meant that he was generally on good terms with the Democratic presidents of his time. In his oral history memoirs, Aiken proudly discusses the fact that he regularly talked with John F. Kennedy during the latter's time as president.<sup>36</sup> Lyndon Johnson continued to invite Aiken to the White House even when the Vermonter began to criticize the administration's handling of the conflict in Vietnam, although Stephen Terry claims that Aiken was frozen out by the President for a time following his October 1966 speech

<sup>33</sup> Sherman, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Aiken's close friendship with Mansfield also meant that the Senator from Vermont was aware of many of the decisions made by the Johnson administration regarding Vietnam. Mansfield was privy to this information as a member of the Democratic leadership of the Congress and, according to Stephen Terry, he would share this information with Aiken. Interview with the author.

<sup>35</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 153.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152, 164. Aiken's relationship with Kennedy dates to their time in the Senate together. According to Stephen Terry, Kennedy's office was right next to Aiken's and the Massachusetts Senator would often come to Aiken's office to consult on matters pertaining to New England, in particular agriculture concerns, would often follow the Vermonter's lead. Terry, interview with author.

implored Johnson to begin reducing the American military presence in southeast Asia.<sup>37</sup> Kennedy and Johnson looked to Aiken to provide bipartisan support for important issues such as the 1963 Test Ban Treaty and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

One of the interesting aspects of Aiken's tenure as a Senator was the relatively small size of his staff. In 1966 he had only eight people working for him, a remarkably small number compared to Robert Kennedy's eighty, Jacob Javits' forty-seven, Everett Dirksen's forty-five and Mike Mansfield's fifteen.<sup>38</sup> The size of Aiken's staff did not deviate very much during his time in the Senate. Although the size of Aiken's staff can be explained, in part, by the fact that he represented the relatively small state of Vermont, the main reason that Aiken's staff was so small is that he wrote almost all of his speeches himself. By Aiken's own estimation he read speeches that had been prepared exclusively by someone else only five or six times in his thirty-four years in Washington.<sup>39</sup> Usually a staff member would prepare a draft listing some issues that Aiken should cover during his speeches but Aiken would invariably take that draft and rewrite it in his own words, often changing the ideas completely. He gave prepared speeches in the Senate infrequently, perhaps once or twice a year.<sup>40</sup> He preferred to speak extemporaneously but if he wanted to be, as he said, deadly accurate on a particular issue he would make sure that the speech was completely written beforehand. He would write the speeches himself and then dictate them so that they could be typed up for him to deliver, evidence of this is apparent in his papers which include many of his handwritten notes. His remarks on the Senate floor were often in response to issues raised by other Senators.<sup>41</sup> His speeches or comments in the Senate, therefore, can be read as accurate reflections of what he was feeling, and not just what a speechwriter or staff member was thinking.<sup>42</sup> Aiken's words were his own and can be used effectively to gauge how he felt about certain issues.

---

<sup>37</sup> Wolfson, p. 6, and Terry, interview with author.

<sup>38</sup> Washington Post article, 30 August 1966. Aiken papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Crate 48, Box 1, Folder 4. According to Terry, Aiken also did not maintain an office in Vermont, a practice that, even at this time, was quite unusual. Terry, interview with author.

<sup>39</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 145.

<sup>40</sup> Terry claims that Aiken, during the years 1969 to 1975, made perhaps three or four prepared speeches a year in the Senate. Otherwise, his remarks would often be the result of "being on the floor, listening to the debate, and standing up and participating. Terry, interview with author.

<sup>41</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, pp. 140-147, and Sherman, pp. 68-69.

<sup>42</sup> This extends to the answering of constituents mail as well. One of Aiken's staff members would prepare a response to a particular letter and invariably Aiken would read over the draft to make sure that it conformed with his views. Each letter was signed personally by Aiken. Stephen Terry, interview with author.



During the 1960s more and more of George Aiken's time was spent on foreign affairs. Up until this time Aiken had been primarily concerned with his work on the Agriculture Committee, although he had by no means divorced himself completely from United States foreign affairs issues. With his appointment to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1954 Aiken began to become more involved with the U.S. role in the world. The advent of the Vietnam War brought Aiken more into the public eye in his role as a critic of American policy. The SFRC came to dominate his time, especially as it became the center of Senate dissent on the Vietnam conflict. Aiken was not known as a man who initiated grand ideas on American foreign policy on the committee, leaving that to others such as the chairman, William Fulbright. Aiken was known to use his influence sparingly and selectively but because he was not viewed as a doctrinaire liberal or conservative his views were listened to attentively by his colleagues.<sup>43</sup>

Aiken's views on American foreign policy were much sought after during this period. His reputation for honesty and integrity, his blunt speaking style, his stature as the dean of Senate Republicans and his increasingly critical comments about the direction of U.S. foreign policy made him an attractive guest on national news programs. He achieved a national reputation that was unequalled in the history of Vermont politics.<sup>44</sup> He was known as the leading Republican dove on the SFRC. Aiken's disagreement with the direction of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia was not new; he had voiced many of the same concerns during the Korean War.

Aiken had championed a strong international role for the United States following the end of the Second World War. Aiken believed that the United States could best serve its interests by giving the United Nations its unqualified support. The Vermont Senator viewed the UN as an ideal tool for settling disputes and achieving peace in trouble spots around the world. Although Aiken championed a strong U.S. foreign policy, he also believed that it was essential that the U.S. government recognize that it had a limited amount of power and resources to influence world affairs. Aiken believed that the United States should focus its attention on the Western Hemisphere, specifically Canada and Latin America. Aiken held that America's preeminent national interests centered on the Western Hemisphere. Aiken emphasized that the

---

<sup>43</sup> Herbers, p. 25, and Wolfson, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Charles F. O'Brien, "Aiken and Vietnam: A Dialogue with Vermont Voters," *Vermont History* 61 (1993), p. 5.

power and influence of the United States, as well as the magnitude of its national interests, decreased in relation to distance from American shores. Elsewhere in the world, the United States should recognize the need to rely on the aid of its allies to help defend American interests.<sup>45</sup>

Aiken was never a firm believer in the Eisenhower Administration's domino theory and he came to be convinced that a monolithic worldwide communist conspiracy under the direction of the Soviet Union did not exist.<sup>46</sup> Aiken was convinced that the United States had to use its power to check the burgeoning power and influence of the Soviet Union but he ascribed the appeal of communism to the paucity of land and resources available to people in numerous countries throughout the world. Aiken believed that the existence of rebellion and unrest in these countries could be traced to the monopoly of land and resources by a precious few powerful men and corporations. Aiken was convinced that the appeal of communism was greatly heightened in these widespread conditions of poverty and despair. As a result, Aiken emphasized that the United States could best serve its national interests by combating communism and promoting American style democracy by working to raise world living standards.<sup>47</sup>

Aiken also favoured combating communism through economic means because he considered a foreign policy based on military power an inherently dangerous option in a nuclear world. Aiken believed that the dawning of the nuclear age made a major military conflict an unacceptably dangerous and foolhardy enterprise. In addition, Aiken also believed that war put a massive strain on the national economy and increased the power of the executive branch, to the point where it threatened national liberty.<sup>48</sup> This issue disturbed Aiken immensely during the two conflicts in Southeast Asia. Aiken came to believe that United States policy concerning the Korean and Vietnam wars was being conceived and executed solely by the executive branch. Aiken feared that the White House was circumventing Congress and that the United States was being led down a dangerous path by reckless and misguided uses of power by the executive

---

<sup>45</sup> Sherman, pp. 101-103.

<sup>46</sup> Concerning the domino theory Aiken later said, "I never fancied the domino theory which told us that if one country fell, then the next one would fall and then the next one until they'd all fall. I don't believe that at all. There may be some others that'll change governments, but that's true all over the world." Morrissey and Sanford, p. 178.

<sup>47</sup> Aiken's desire to induce the American government to pledge to raise the standard of living throughout the world also meshed with his preeminent domestic concern. Aiken's main domestic concern centered on the plight of small farmers, especially those from his home state. Aiken believed that the problems of the small farmer could be alleviated to a large degree by an aggressive effort by the federal government to open up more world markets for the distribution and sale of American agricultural surpluses. Aiken believed that such an aggressive internationalist foreign policy could help both American farmers and the world's poor and destitute. Sherman, p. 101.

<sup>48</sup> Sherman, p. 102.

branch. Initially his criticism of President Truman was muted, however, because he believed that once troops had been committed the prestige of the United States would suffer a terrible blow around the world if they were suddenly pulled out. Aiken also considered North Korea to be the aggressor in the conflict and he supported the use of U.S. forces because he felt that failure to meet this aggression would have negative worldwide repercussions for the United States and its allies. Aiken was bothered, however, by the Administration's lack of consultation with Congress prior to the decision to send American forces to Korea and he began to criticize the Administration on this basis. He contended that he and his fellow Senators had been left with little choice but to support President Truman's decisions.

Aiken's greatest fear was that China would be drawn into the war, a situation that could possibly lead to an eventual world war with the Soviet Union, a result Aiken deemed so destructive that contemplation of it was unthinkable. As the war went on Aiken's disenchantment with the Truman Administration rose, most acutely when the Chinese did indeed join the conflict on the side of the North Koreans. Aiken broke with many of his Republican colleagues by vigorously opposing any efforts to expand the war further. Aiken firmly believed that United States forces would have a very difficult time winning a ground war in Asia. He also contended that Taiwan nationalists stood little chance of defeating Chinese Communists in a military confrontation. Aiken emphatically objected to the notion that the United States could achieve a military victory in Korea by invading China or using nuclear weapons. Aiken began to attack Truman and his Administration more strenuously for what he perceived as misguided decision making and the usurpation of power from the legislative branch in foreign affairs. He began to voice his opinion that U.S. voters must replace Truman as president because the Administration had forfeited its ability to make peace in the region. He strongly supported the presidential candidacy of General Dwight Eisenhower on the grounds that the former military commander stood the best chance of achieving peace in Korea.<sup>49</sup> All of these positions, the fear of executive power and the need to replace a Democratic president as well as the idea that Southeast Asia was a terrible place for the U.S. to engage itself in a massive ground war were echoed by Aiken during the 1960s.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-105.

<sup>50</sup> O'Brien, pp. 6-8.

Senator Aiken wanted to end his political career in 1968. By that year he was seventy-six years old and after thirty-seven years in public service he wished to return to his home in Putney, Vermont. Mike Mansfield urged him, however, to ask Vermonters for permission to serve a sixth and final term. Mansfield wanted Aiken to remain in the Senate so that the two could continue to work to try to change the nature of U.S. policy in Vietnam. Mansfield considered Aiken a key ally, important for keeping like minded Republican Senators such as Jacob Javits and Clifford Case firm in their opposition to the war in Southeast Asia.<sup>51</sup> While Aiken ceded to Mansfield's request he also promised himself that this would indeed be his last term, a secret he kept until February 1974.<sup>52</sup> Even though many Vermonters disagreed with his stand on Vietnam, Aiken was all but assured of being reelected in 1968. His appeal in Vermont crossed party lines, insuring that Aiken would be supported by members of Vermont's newly powerful Democratic Party.

Vermont Democrats had been making steady gains throughout the 1950s, even winning the state's lone Congressional seat in 1958. The Republican Party was no longer as strongly unified a force as it once had been, it had splintered into many factions resulting in bruising primary fights which left them significantly weakened for the general elections. Immigration also played a large role in the Democrats increasing fortunes. Between 1950 and 1970 thousands of people moved to Vermont from elsewhere in the United States, by 1970 one fourth of the permanent residents were from out of state. Many of these new Vermonters brought with them their Democratic Party affiliations.<sup>53</sup> Republicans continued to hold off the Democrats in gubernatorial races but by 1958 the margin of victory had slipped to the point where a recount was needed to determine the winner. The Democrats finally achieved a breakthrough in the 1962 race for Governor when Philip Hoff defeated his incumbent Republican opponent, F. Ray Keyser by fifteen hundred votes. Hoff solidified his hold on the Governor's mansion in 1964 at the same time that Lyndon Johnson was defeating Barry Goldwater by a substantial margin in the presidential race. Hoff won a third term in 1966, again easily defeating his Republican challenger. These victories in the race for Governor did not, however, translate into success against George Aiken. The Senator easily gained

---

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Terry, interview with author.

<sup>52</sup> Sherman, p. 64.

<sup>53</sup> Doyle, p. 200.

reelection in 1962, garnering almost sixty-seven percent of the vote.<sup>54</sup>

There is no question that incumbency played a large role in Aiken's continued electoral success. The advantages of name recognition and senatorial seniority and its promise of largesse for Vermont were undeniable advantages. The election of 1968 demonstrated that there was more to Aiken's overwhelming victories in Vermont. Quite simply, Vermont Democrats liked Aiken as well. There had been speculation in Vermont politics that Hoff would attempt a challenge against Aiken but the Governor, realizing that his chances were slim at best, quickly quelled such speculation by endorsing Aiken for the *Democratic* nomination! Hoff claimed that more Democrats than Republicans would vote for Aiken, saying that the Senator was "a great credit to Vermont and we are honored to have a man of this caliber represent us."<sup>55</sup> Hoff had been an enthusiastic supporter of Robert Kennedy's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination until the New York Senator's assassination, when he shifted his allegiance to Eugene McCarthy, another peace candidate.<sup>56</sup> Aiken's dovish views on Vietnam were therefore quite compatible with Hoff's and many other Vermont Democrats. Ironically for Aiken, his opposition came not from the Democrats but from within his own party.

A Vermont schoolteacher named William K. Tufts challenged Aiken in the Republican primary. Tufts represented the conservative wing of his party, styling himself a peace candidate because of his support for a massive American bombing campaign against North Vietnam as a means of ending the war.<sup>57</sup> Aiken was forced into doing some campaigning against Tufts, making appearances at various events around the state in the weeks leading up to the primary. Aiken needn't have been overly worried as he overwhelmed Tufts, out polling him by a three to one margin. He was also victorious in the Democratic primary and in the general election, when he received more than ninety-nine percent of the vote. Aiken managed to hold off the rebellion from within the right wing of his party. His views on the war, while wounding him in the state, were nowhere near fatal and he could reliably count on Vermonters to show him their continued support. The Republicans were also able to regain the Governor's mansion when Hoff declined to seek

---

<sup>54</sup> Carter, p. 161.

<sup>55</sup> *Rutland Herald* article, 8 August 1968, Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 21.

<sup>56</sup> According to Stephen Terry Hoff was the first Democratic Governor to come out against President Johnson's campaign for reelection in 1968. Terry, interview with the author.

<sup>57</sup> *Rutland Herald* article, 25 July 1968, Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 21.

reelection. In 1970 Hoff, seeking to win a Senate seat, was soundly defeated by Vermont's other Republican Senator, William Prouty, a victory which seemed to signal a renewed Republican loyalty in the state. Upon Aiken's retirement in 1974, however, Democrat Patrick Leahy defeated Richard W. Mallary to gain election to the Senate.

The overwhelming endorsement that Vermonters gave Aiken in his bid for a sixth term was more than Aiken had expected but he had nevertheless been very confident of his achieving reelection. The Senator could therefore confidently hold views that at times were at variance with those of the people from his home state. Vermont was a reflection of the rest of the United States as far as the war in Vietnam was concerned, in 1964 and 1965 Vermonters overwhelmingly supported the White House in its Southeast Asia goals. The war became less popular during 1966 and 1967 but initially Aiken's dovish views on the war could not be said to be in keeping with the views of the majority of Vermonters. Aiken could take comfort from the fact that mail from his constituents ran almost four to one against the war even from its earliest stages but this was only a relatively small sampling of opinion from his home state. Vermont newspapers, particularly the *Burlington Free Press* and the *Vermont Sunday News*, were vociferous in their editorial criticism of Aiken's views on the war.<sup>58</sup> Aiken's first lengthy statement on the war in June 1964 in which he decried the state of the South Vietnamese government and declared that any effort by the U.S. government to expand the war would not have his support, led to an immediate response from the *Free Press*. An editorial in the paper, the largest in Vermont, attacked Aiken's views and stressed that the Communists in Cambodia and North Vietnam were to blame for the murder of American soldiers as well as Vietnamese citizens and that "it is hoped that President Johnson, Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara will not be as timorous in this crisis as Senator Aiken seems to be."<sup>59</sup> The criticism from these newspapers, more conservative than Aiken, did not deter the Senator from expressing his views. He was confident that Vermonters would support his continued independence.

The 1968 election demonstrates another facet of Aiken's political career that enabled him to hold independent views. His expenses for the campaign came to a grand total of \$17.09. In his statement of

---

<sup>58</sup> O'Brien, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in O'Brien, pp. 9-10.

expenditures Aiken listed \$11.03 for postage, \$4.83 for transportation, presumably for gas for his car which he used to drive himself around the state, and \$1.23 for telephone calls.<sup>60</sup> Although Vermont was not a hotbed of massive campaign spending during this time \$17.09 for an entire election season still stood out as a remarkably minuscule outlay of funds. Aiken did not accept campaign contributions, those that were pledged to him were returned including amounts as large as \$2,500 from the Republican Senatorial Committee and as small as a \$1 donation from a resident of Vermont.<sup>61</sup> As a result Aiken was not beholden to anyone for campaign contributions. Although Aiken's views were most certainly shaped, in part, by residents of Vermont, he was not pressured to hold positions in return for the promise of campaign money.

Unlike Senators such as William Fulbright or Ernest Gruening, George Aiken did not continually speak out against the war in Vietnam. His criticisms came sparingly but when they were made, they were direct and succinct. His reputation as a man of honour meant that his statements on the war were taken seriously by members of both parties, including President Johnson. His position as one of the few Republican Senators to voice opposition to the war also made him unique in Washington. What began as criticism of U.S. policy in 1964 became by 1967 a call for the defeat of Lyndon Johnson. His relationship with Johnson, though certainly strained at times, remained cordial throughout the President's administration, giving Aiken the opportunity to voice his opposition to expanding U.S. commitments to Vietnam directly to LBJ. Aiken, however, became increasingly disillusioned with the administration's refusal to consider more carefully the views being espoused by himself and others to the point where he commented bitterly in the Senate that "I have no advice to give the administration. They would not take it if I gave it. So what is the use of wasting my breath?"<sup>62</sup> Aiken's frustration did not mean that his criticism was at an end; he continued to voice his opinions, as he had since 1964. Lyndon Johnson's announcement, on March 31, 1968, that he would not seek reelection as President of the United States served as proof that Aiken's warnings about the dangers of escalating the war in Southeast Asia were eminently valid. What

---

<sup>60</sup> Statement of Expenditures of Candidates for Nomination - United States Senate, Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 5.

<sup>61</sup> 1968 Campaign Contributions to GDA, Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 4. Terry claims that almost all of this relatively small sum of money was spent in the primary campaign. Aiken's former aide also subscribes to the idea that Aiken's independence stemmed, in part, from the fact that he did not have to rely on anyone for campaign contributions. Terry, interview with author.

<sup>62</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 18370.

gave Aiken's opposition to the war more validity was the fact that he had begun expressing it as early as 1963, long before others joined the quest for peace.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *THE STORM GATHERS*

By the time Lyndon Johnson became President of the United States, George Aiken had developed serious misgivings about American policy in Southeast Asia. In the last year of the Kennedy administration, Aiken had made it clear that he did not concur with the rosy assessments offered by White House officials concerning conditions in South Vietnam. As a result, Aiken began to worry that if the American government continued to follow policies initiated during John Kennedy's time in the White House, the United States could soon find itself bogged down in a major war in Southeast Asia. Although the Vermont Senator believed that the United States had an obligation to help the people of South Vietnam in defense of their country, he did not want the Johnson administration to unduly expand the American military presence in that distant land. Increasingly fearful that such a policy was soon to be realized, Aiken stressed that the participation of the United Nations was vital to any attempt to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. In August of 1964, however, Aiken's pleas for restraint were ignored by the White House as the administration used the pretext of naval attacks on American ships in the Tonkin Gulf to launch a series of air strikes against North Vietnam. The first salvo in an air war that was to last for another decade was accompanied by passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, an unprecedented congressional giveaway of power that Aiken participated in. Acting against his better instincts, Aiken placed his trust in Lyndon Johnson, an action he would soon come to regret.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy was a great shock to the American people. The four days following his death, from November 22 to November 25, 1963, produced an emotional upheaval unprecedented in American history. It was a defining event, one that would etch itself in the American psyche. For millions and millions of Americans the answer to the question "where were you when you heard that Kennedy had been killed" was easily remembered. The assassination brought yet another momentous event with it, the ascension of Lyndon Baines Johnson to the office of the Presidency. The Congress of the United States was not immune to the grief that enveloped the nation. Members of

Congress were as stunned by the news of Kennedy's death as the American people. Johnson, however, was a man they knew very well. The new President had served in the House of Representatives for twelve years before being elected to the Senate in 1948. In 1953 his Democratic colleagues elected him Senate Minority Leader. By 1955 he was installed as the Majority Leader. As a result, LBJ was extremely familiar to most members of Congress, particularly those in the Senate.

Lyndon Johnson understood Congress, much more than did his predecessor. It was an institution which he loved, one that he could, more often than not, bend to his will.<sup>1</sup> He moved quickly to placate its members, to enlist their help in his mission to enact the legislation that John Kennedy had been unable or unwilling to push through Congress. The new President chose the Congress as the site of his first major address. On November 27, 1963, he spoke before a joint session. He said, in part,

The ideas and the ideals which (Kennedy) so nobly represented must and will be translated into effective action....In this critical moment, it is our duty, yours and mine, to do away with uncertainty and delay and doubt and to show that we are capable of decisive action: that from the brutal loss of our leader we will derive not weakness but strength, that we can will act and act now....John Kennedy's death commands what his life conveyed – that American must move forward.<sup>2</sup>

George D. Aiken was among the members of Congress in attendance that day. The Vermont Senator had known Johnson since the latter's election to the Senate in 1948. He had been subject to the famous Johnson treatment wherein LBJ would tower over his prey, cajoling, prodding, demanding and pleading for their help in getting legislation passed. He was fully aware of Johnson's many skills as a Senator and presented his views on how much support the former legislator could expect from Congress in an interview he gave on December 8, 1963, only seventeen days after LBJ had assumed the Presidency.

Aiken made it clear that he considered Lyndon Johnson to be a fine politician. He described him as a man who was "one of the most expert politicians of the country" and that he hoped that he would be "an equally good Administrator."<sup>3</sup> Aiken felt that Johnson's long service in the Congress would help

<sup>1</sup> Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1964* (New York, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York, 1976), pp. 180-181.

<sup>3</sup> Aiken interview *Opinion In The Capital*, 8 December 1963, Aiken Papers, Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University Of Vermont, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 4. In a telephone call with Aiken on November 30, 1963, Johnson demonstrated his prowess for political ego stroking. Johnson indicated to Aiken that he had wanted to check with him first before asking Vermont's Democratic Governor Phillip Hoff to make an appearance at an Independence Day celebration in Zanzibar on behalf of the Administration. Johnson told Aiken that he "wanted to call him but I didn't want to without consulting you and I thought when I did talk to him I would tell him that I had talked to you because you were kind of my Daddy down here and I didn't want to do anything without talking to you and you said he'd make a

immensely in his relations with that body. Aiken had already met with Johnson shortly after the President had assumed his duties. In response to a question about the manner in which LBJ would deal with Congress, Aiken replied that "he's already demonstrated that he wants to keep on a closer relationship with the Congress and I doubt if he will rely quite so much on advisers as some of his predecessors have, but will take more direct action in order to get things done."<sup>4</sup> Aiken also spoke of the feeling, quite palpable at the time, that the country had been united in its time of grief. He stressed, however, his belief that things would settle down in due course, and that after what he called a period of readjustment, the government would return to its normal routines.

Aiken sent a clear signal to the White House that while he approved of Johnson's initial dealings with Congress, he was not, in any way, even in this time of crisis, endorsing a blank check for LBJ vis-a-vis the legislative branch. However, Aiken, though a Republican, was certainly not against helping a Democratic President. This philosophy was enunciated quite clearly in answer to a question from interviewer Mark Evans. Aiken said,

Well, sometimes, Mark, I'm accused of not working hard enough for my Party, but I think that the best politics one can play is to do their job well. When any president, regardless of Party, takes a position, or makes a statement, or recommends some program which is good for the country, I feel that it's only good politics sometimes, to get behind him and help him do the best job he possibly can for the country....be the best President it's possible for him to be.<sup>5</sup>

It is obvious from the above statement that Aiken was perfectly willing to work with Lyndon Johnson. On the issue of Vietnam, however, Aiken would soon take issue with Johnson's policies.

While Aiken had not been publicly vociferous in his opposition, as early as 1963 he had let it be clearly known that he was worried about how things were progressing in Southeast Asia. In an interview given in February of 1963 he revealed his pessimism regarding Vietnam. Aiken made it clear that he felt that the Kennedy administration was being overly optimistic in its statements on Vietnam.

Q. Do you agree with the optimistic statements that officials have been making lately

---

good man." After gentle prodding from Johnson, Aiken agreed that Hoff would be a good choice, adding wryly that "I like Phil but I do have to correct him once in awhile", to which the President replied, "Well, George, you have to do that to all of us." The call demonstrates the famous Johnson treatment in action. Johnson Library, Recordings of Telephone Conversations Related to the Kennedy Assassination, November 30, 1963, Tape K 6311.07.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Charles T. Morrissey and D. Gregory Sanford, *That Man From Vermont – George David Aiken, An Oral History Memoir* (Burlington, Vermont, 1981), pp. 149-151.

about progress in Vietnam?

Senator Aiken: No. They are contradictory to the news reports from Vietnam. The situation appears to be getting worse, but, nevertheless, I can't see how we are going to get out of it. We will have to stay there and help the present government maintain as good order as possible. But the thing that worries me is that we might undertake to do the same thing in India, send in advisors, send in planes, send in a few helicopters, and the next thing we know we will be taking over somebody else's war.

Q. Would you favour putting combat troops into South Vietnam if it is the alternative to a defeat?

Senator Aiken: I think we have combat troops in there now.<sup>6</sup>

Aiken's blunt assessment of the situation in Vietnam, that the United States had indeed by this time begun to take over the war, was contradictory to the posture the administration was maintaining. The White House stressed that the U.S. was helping the South Vietnamese in their attempt to fight their own war. President Kennedy, in an interview with Walter Cronkite, said "in the final analysis it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it, the people of Vietnam, against the Communists."<sup>7</sup> Obviously, Aiken did not agree with Kennedy's description of American troops in Vietnam as "advisers". Aiken was also beginning to be disturbed by the White House's lack of consultation with Congress regarding American policies in Vietnam, a concern that heightened quickly following Lyndon Johnson's assumption of the Presidency.

Aiken's concerns about the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam increased in 1964, the first full year of the Johnson administration. Privately he mused about the lack of a clear policy from the Johnson administration concerning Vietnam. In letters to constituents he expressed his concern that the White House was unable to devise a coherent direction in dealing with the issue. In response to a letter from a fellow Vermonter dated March 5, 1964 he wrote.

I share your concern about Vietnam and I am particularly apprehensive about our inability to take a firm stand one way or another. This is the responsibility of the President and if we just knew what the policy was, we might be able to understand the situation better.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Transcript of *On The Record* interview, February 1963, Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 4.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (New York, 1993), p. 587.

<sup>8</sup> Aiken to Rev. and Mrs. Howard Lever, 5 March 1964, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 8.

In a similar letter dated May 20, 1964 he wrote that "the situation is a mess and the administration's handling of the problem leaves much to be desired."<sup>9</sup> Aiken's frustration with the lack of information from the administration was made abundantly clear in a letter dated March 13 in which he stated that "it is the responsibility of the President under the Constitution and we are not kept very well informed as to what our policy is", writing further that "under the circumstances, the Foreign Relations Committee does the best it can."<sup>10</sup>

Aiken's private concerns about the situation in Vietnam were accentuated by the troubling reports that were emerging from Southeast Asia. Although members of the Johnson administration continued to present an optimistic front even they, on occasion, revealed that major problems did indeed exist in Vietnam. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said in a speech given March 26, 1964, that "the situation in South Vietnam has unquestionably worsened", adding the ominous observation that "the road ahead in Vietnam is going to be long, difficult and frustrating."<sup>11</sup> At the same time, however, McNamara offered no solutions to the difficulties facing the U.S. While continuing to insist publicly that the war was South Vietnam's to win, the administration began privately to initiate plans under which U.S. involvement could be expanded if necessary.

The reality in Vietnam was that the country was indeed in a chaotic state. The junta that had assumed power upon the assassination of South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem on November 2, 1963, had itself been overthrown in January of 1964.<sup>12</sup> The new man in charge was General Nguyen Khanh, a thirty-seven year old Field Commander. The change in government did nothing to stabilize the situation in South Vietnam. Indeed, Vietcong units in South Vietnam had become so aggressive that Khanh had to, in April, resort to constructing a special zone of defense around Saigon itself.<sup>13</sup> The fact that the South Vietnamese capital was not immune to military incursions by the Vietcong revealed the severe problems

<sup>9</sup> Aiken to Mr. Ronald Paquette, 20 May 1964, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 8.

<sup>10</sup> Aiken to Mr. John Parke, 13 March 1964, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 8.

<sup>11</sup> Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>12</sup> Aiken had liked and respected President Diem. In 1957 he and Senator Mansfield had an extensive visit with him in Washington during a trip by Diem to the U.S. capital. Aiken maintained that the assassination of Diem was a regrettable action, one that had negative repercussions for the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia. Interview with George Aiken, October 19, 1978, Aiken Papers, Crate 61, Box 6, Folder 29A. In a 1964 speech Aiken said that Diem "was without doubt a friend of the Western nations and a foe of communism." *Congressional Record - Senate*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 12373.

<sup>13</sup> Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam At War* (Novato, California, 1988), p. 284.

facing U.S. planners.

The administration continued to receive gloomy reports on the war. On May 15, 1964, the CIA submitted an assessment, which read, in part,

The over-all situation in South Vietnam remains extremely fragile. Although there has been some improvement in South Vietnam's military performance, sustained Vietcong pressure continues to erode the government's authority throughout the country, undercut U.S. and Vietnamese programs and depress South Vietnamese morale. We do not see any signs that these trends are yet "bottoming out"...If the tide of deterioration has not been arrested by the end of the year, the anti-Communist position in South Vietnam is likely to become untenable.<sup>14</sup>

Although reports such as these were, for the most part, kept from the press, reporters in Vietnam began to reveal to the American people the extent of the predicament in Southeast Asia. In January 1964, *Newsweek* asked the question, "Vietnam: Can the Reds be Beaten?" The article raised serious questions about the effectiveness of the American effort in Vietnam. Included in the report was a bleak assessment of the progress of U.S. aid, "clearly, the Vietnam war, which has already cost the U.S. \$3 billion and 162 lives, and now chews up \$1.5 million a day in U.S. aid, is not being won."<sup>15</sup> The press continued to reinforce the impression that things were not going well in Vietnam, going as far as to wonder whether the U.S. was heading towards a fate similar to the one faced by the French at Dienbienphu in 1954.<sup>16</sup> While it highlighted the problems in Vietnam, the press was not, however, for the most part, advocating a withdrawal from the area. In fact, the opposite was often true.

An editorial in the May 29, 1964, *Life* magazine exemplifies the attitude regarding increasing the U.S. pressure on the Vietcong. The piece, entitled "Vietnam: Time For Reappraisal", decried the administration for its lack of ideas on how to insure the success of the U.S. mission in Vietnam. To this end, the editorial stressed that changes needed to be made. It read, in part,

The U.S. should reappraise its self-limiting role in Southeast Asia. Assuming that we will not consider giving up and getting out, there are two main areas for discussion. First, are we prepared to take over management of the fighting, thus bypassing the often frustrating and inefficient Vietnamese command? Second, how far are we willing to carry the fighting? Into North Vietnam? Into China? Quite possibly the administration possesses information which makes its choice of a cautious policy the wisest one, even

---

<sup>14</sup> McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> "Can The Reds Be Beaten?" *Newsweek* (January 6, 1964), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> "Dienbienphu: Could It Happen Again?" *Time* (May 15, 1964), p. 43.

though it looks bad superficially.<sup>17</sup>

The editorial called for an added commitment to the area, not a diminution of the U.S. role. The notion that the U.S. could or should abandon its interests in the area was not even considered. At the same time, the administration had undertaken the latest in a series of meetings on U.S. policy in Vietnam. Johnson had asked government officials, including Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, to meet in Honolulu to discuss the situation in South Vietnam. Senator Aiken used the Honolulu conference as an occasion for making a lengthy speech in the Senate outlining his apprehensions regarding the U.S. position in the area.

Aiken's concerns about the situation in Vietnam were laid out in full during this speech. Essentially, Aiken felt that a ground war in Southeast Asia was unthinkable. On this point, he held firm. He did not want to see the war expanded, he feared that it could easily lead to a much wider war, one which would see the United States doing battle with the Chinese. In the June 2, 1964 speech in the Senate, Aiken made his views known. In many ways it was a remarkably prescient talk, particularly in its description of the manner in which a wider war would be fought.

Aiken viewed the war as unwinnable because the enemy was not willing to fight a conventional war, one in which each side knew where the enemy was and where overpowering force would rule the battlefield. The United States would not be able to bludgeon the enemy as they had in World War II by massing its resources in an all out battle. Aiken recognized that the enemy would not cooperate by leaving itself open to mass attacks. As he said, "if the Chinese or North Vietnamese would only fight with planes or tanks or something modern we could knock them right out of the sky, bomb their roads, bridges, and fuel supply depots, and win without too much difficulty."<sup>18</sup> Aiken then addressed an issue that would become more frequently raised as the years went on. The Senator stressed his opposition to using nuclear weapons, an option he considered out of the question because the ruination which would be unleashed by using such weapons of mass destruction would bring "results which he did not like to contemplate."<sup>19</sup> After establishing the difficulties, as he saw them, which American troops would face in Vietnam, Aiken

---

<sup>17</sup> "Vietnam: Time For Reappraisal" *Life* (May 29, 1964), p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Congressional Record – Senate, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 12373.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

proceeded to enunciate his four basic principles concerning America's role in Southeast Asia. These principles would form the basis of his thinking during the years of the Johnson administration. Time and again he would come back to the ideas which he laid out in this Senate talk.

Aiken's first principle involved the expansion of military operations in Southeast Asia. He flatly opposed any troop expansion that would, in his words, "lead to a general war in Southeast Asia".<sup>20</sup> Aiken was careful to make the point that he did not oppose the stationing of troops in Vietnam or other countries in this region of the world. What he feared was a situation in which American troops would be fighting the Chinese. As a result, Aiken was adamantly against policies that would expand the war to the point where the risk of drawing the Chinese in on the side of the North Vietnamese existed. He illustrated this principle, saying,

I would not object to stationing detachments of reasonable numbers in Thailand for defensive purposes if the government of that country requests it and if the government and people of Thailand are willing to defend their own country with full force, and if such action is not a prelude to a wide expansion of the war.<sup>21</sup>

Aiken's wish that the war not be expanded went hand in hand with his second principle, that the United States not abandon its commitments to Vietnam. He was not advocating a total withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia. He did not believe that it was wise for the U.S. to abdicate its responsibilities in the area. For Aiken, total withdrawal was as foolish as expanding the war. He envisioned a long-term commitment to the area.<sup>22</sup> He said that "it will be necessary to render both military and economic assistance to that country for some time- maintaining a stalemate with the rebels for the time being if that is the best we can do."<sup>23</sup> Aiken never believed that it was possible to simply leave Vietnam to its own devices. Aiken was not, however, a believer in the domino theory, the idea that the fall of one country, in

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Aiken recognized that the United States had strategic interests in Southeast Asia. The fact that China had been taken over by communists in the late 1940s and early 1950s had a great psychological impact on the American body politic and Aiken was well aware of the fear, widely held by numerous Americans, that if South Vietnam fell to communist forces U.S. national security would be gravely threatened. It is for this reason that Aiken did not recommend a complete withdrawal from South Vietnam. He illuminated the problem facing the United States, stating that "our problem has been compounded. Not only have we assumed the responsibility for maintaining a stable government in South Vietnam; not only are we concerned with the possible loss of large markets for American commodities in Southeast Asia; and not only are we disturbed increasing dissension among our friends and allies, but for some time there is the problem of making things better for those same people who only last year were telling us that all was going well." Congressional Record - Senate, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 12373. Aiken was well aware that statements of support issued by the Administration for South Vietnam, ones that continually stressed the strategic importance of South Vietnam, had made American withdrawal from Southeast Asia all the more difficult.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



this case Vietnam could lead to the fall of a multitude of countries, a theory widely believed at the time.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, he was unwilling to subscribe to the theory that the United States should simply leave the South Vietnamese to their own devices. He believed that the government and the people of South Vietnam had to defend their own country, with generous help from the American government.

The third principle that Aiken hewed to during the Johnson administration revolved around the United Nations. The Vermont Republican stressed using the UN for two reasons. He believed, firstly, that the international body should be used as a device for facilitating the establishment or continuation of peace in Southeast Asian countries. Secondly, Aiken wanted to insure, to the fullest extent possible, that the United States was not isolated in pursuit of its aims in Vietnam and other countries of the region. As he said, "the United States cannot afford to go it alone when the security of the Nation and the world is threatened."<sup>25</sup> Again, Aiken's views were a foreshadowing of what would occur during the 1960's, namely the inexorable isolation of the United States in its Vietnam policy.

The last principle that Aiken discussed that day centered on the responsibility of the President in making foreign policy decisions. While Aiken believed that the Congress of the United States should be at all times consulted and informed about foreign policy he continued to hold to the belief that the President was at the center of foreign policy decision making. He made this clear in the closing of his speech, stating,

Where does the responsibility rest for deciding what course our country should follow relative to Southeast Asia problems? Well, not with Secretary McNamara, not with Secretary Rusk, not with Ambassador Lodge, even though these three may play important roles as advisers. The responsibility rests squarely and heavily on the shoulders of the President of the United States, and the correctness of his decisions will determine his place in history, provided, of course, that there is a history.<sup>26</sup>

Aiken continued to hold the President responsible for decision-making on Vietnam up to and including the election year of 1968. Aiken felt that Johnson, regardless of repeated escalations, continued to wish for peace in Vietnam throughout 1965, 1966 and much of 1967. Aiken's final break with the Johnson administration arose out of his belief that even if Johnson continued to hope for peace in the region he had

---

<sup>24</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 178.

<sup>25</sup> Congressional Record – Senate, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 12373.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

in fact become a liability to the pursuit of that goal. Presidential prerogative in foreign policy was exactly the reason that Aiken began calling for a replacement for Lyndon Johnson, he no longer felt that Johnson could make peace, therefore he had to go.

During the spring and summer of 1964 the United States authorized two military operations aimed at harassing North Vietnam and collecting intelligence data. The first was called Operation Plan 34A. This program had two goals: one involved dropping off South Vietnamese agents equipped with radios into North Vietnam so they could conduct sabotage and gather intelligence; the second had high speed patrol boats manned by South Vietnamese or foreign mercenaries launching hit and run attacks against North Vietnamese shore and island installations.<sup>27</sup> Simultaneously, the U.S. was conducting DESOTO patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. These involved specially equipped U.S. naval vessels, which were designed to collect radio and radar signals from shore-based stations on coastal regions of countries such as the Soviet Union and North Korea. These DESOTO patrols were now being conducted in the Gulf of Tonkin. By late July of 1964 it had become quite clear that the Operation Plan 34A attacks were largely ineffectual. The South Vietnamese government, however, felt that they were a low cost way of harassing North Vietnam and they were continued. On the night of July 30, 1964, an attack by two South Vietnamese patrol boats occurred against two North Vietnamese islands in the Tonkin Gulf that were suspected of having support systems in place for infiltration operations against the South.<sup>28</sup> The following morning the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* moved into the Tonkin Gulf on a DESOTO mission. On August 2, the *Maddox* was patrolling the northern part of the Gulf when three North Vietnamese patrol boats approached her. A firefight ensued with little damage to the U.S. ship, the Vietnamese boats, however, suffered great damage, with one having being sunk. There is no doubt that this first attack occurred, in fact, North Vietnam confirmed that it had ordered the attack in its official history of the war.<sup>29</sup> At the time, officials in Washington immediately began to consider how to respond to the attack.

President Johnson called a meeting of key advisers to consider the appropriate U.S. response. The

---

<sup>27</sup> McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

group came to the conclusion that it was quite possible that a local North Vietnamese commander had ordered the attack. As a result, Johnson concluded that it was probable that senior North Vietnamese officials were not involved in the decision making process. For this reason he believed that it was best not to retaliate with military force. Instead he approved a diplomatic note to Hanoi, the first of its kind, which contained a warning that "grave consequences would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action."<sup>30</sup> The President also ordered a second U.S. destroyer, the *C. Turner Joy*, to join the *Maddox* for further DESOTO patrols in the Gulf. Johnson disingenuously stressed in his memoirs that the 34A missions and the DESOTO patrols were not connected.<sup>31</sup> They were, however, connected in the sense that they were both military operations against North Vietnam. Hanoi was in all probability under the impression that the two were directly connected and therefore ordered attacks against U.S. ships as a way of preventing further attacks against its positions.

Lyndon Johnson considered it vital for the administration to have congressional approval for any escalation of military activities against North Vietnam. The President felt that one of the mistakes Harry Truman had made during the Korean War was in not asking the Congress to approve military action. Furthermore he believed that having congressional approval would help to inoculate him from future congressional criticism and he continually used the Truman example to make his point.<sup>32</sup> The administration had, in fact, months before, prepared what amounted to a blank check resolution to be presented to the Congress at a time when its passage was all but certain. On May 24, 1964, Undersecretary of State George Ball submitted a draft of the resolution to the National Security Council. This was the basis of the resolution, which was later sent to the Congress for approval.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, 1983), p. 369, and McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point – Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (London, 1972), p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York and London, 1990), p. 445, and Johnson, pp. 114-117, and McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 120. Johnson's political antenna was always well tuned to any criticism emanating from Congress over any of the policies of his Administration. In late June 1964, Johnson reacted quickly to a perceived criticism from George Aiken. Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge informed Johnson that he was resigning for ostensibly personal reasons. In reality, the former Senator was returning to the United States to aid Governor William Scranton in his bid to deny Barry Goldwater the Republican presidential nomination. Aiken was quoted as having said that Lodge was resigning because of a difference of opinion with the Administration. Johnson immediately instructed Dean Rusk to inform Aiken that Lodge had been quoted as saying that he was resigning in order to help Scranton. Apparently not satisfied, Johnson then called Mike Mansfield and insisted that the Majority Leader talk to Aiken in order to set him straight. To that end, Johnson read AP and UP wire reports that carried Lodge's quotes regarding Scranton to Mansfield over the phone. Again, later that same day, Johnson phoned Rusk in order to ascertain whether the Secretary of State had talked to Aiken. Rusk finally managed to alleviate Johnson's concerns by telling the President that Aiken was insisting that he had been misquoted and had agreed to issue a public statement attesting to that fact. Johnson Library, Recordings of Telephone Conversations and Meetings – White House Series, June 23, 1964, Tapes WH 6406.14 and WH 6406.16.

<sup>33</sup> McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 120.

The event that led the administration to present Congress with a resolution approving the use of additional force in Vietnam was the White House's contention that North Vietnam initiated a second attack on U.S. naval ships in the Tonkin Gulf. Members of the administration certainly convinced themselves that a second attack had occurred. Subsequent examination of the August 4 incident has revealed that there never was such an attack. In fact, the captain on board the *Maddox* sent a message to Washington six hours after the alleged attack which indicated that he had serious doubts as to whether the Vietnamese assault had occurred. It read,

Review of action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects on radar and overeager sonar men may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by *Maddox*. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action taken.<sup>34</sup>

The administration tended to downplay the doubts that some had about whether the attack occurred. Although McNamara claimed that he wanted to be "damned sure that the attacks had taken place", the Defense Secretary and his aides examined the evidence available to them in a selective manner designed to confirm what they wanted to believe, that an attack had indeed taken place.<sup>35</sup> The White House seems to have been consumed by a desire to retaliate against the North Vietnamese and a seemingly unstoppable momentum had arisen to initiate air strikes.<sup>36</sup>

On the afternoon of August 4 President Johnson, after accepting without question McNamara's conclusions that a second attack had taken place, authorized retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and nearby oil storage dumps.<sup>37</sup> Johnson went on television that night to tell the American people of the U.S. actions being taken. He said, "renewed hostile actions required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply."<sup>38</sup> Johnson also said that the U.S. was not seeking to widen the war, it was merely responding to unacceptable enemy actions. The initial response to the President's actions was overwhelmingly positive. *Time* magazine wrote that the U.S. attack was "carefully measured and fitted to match the challenge, won instantaneous, widespread support

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Herring, p. 121.

<sup>36</sup> Karnow, pp. 371-373, and Herring, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Herring, p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> "Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War'." *Newsweek* (August 17, 1964), p. 17.

for the President within the Nation and from a strong array of U.S. friends around the world."<sup>39</sup> The President's approval rating soared from 42 percent to 72 percent overnight in the Harris poll.<sup>40</sup> It was in this atmosphere of mass approval for the President's actions that the Congress undertook consideration of the President's resolution regarding Vietnam.

The administration had been keeping certain members of Congress informed of its actions in Vietnam. On August 3, 1964, Defense Secretary McNamara testified before a secret joint session of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees. McNamara informed the committees of the 34A raids that were being conducted against North Vietnam. George Aiken, as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations committee, was therefore privy to this information. In a meeting the President had with congressional leaders at the White House on the night of August 4 Aiken revealed his suspicion that the North Vietnamese were not launching entirely unprovoked attacks against U.S. destroyers, as the administration was leading the American public to believe. The President had called the hastily convened meeting in order to brief important members of Congress on the U.S. response to the Tonkin Gulf attacks and to enlist their aid in getting a supporting resolution passed.

Among the legislators present were Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Montana), Hubert Humphrey (D-Minnesota), the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee William Fulbright (D-Arkansas), Richard Russell (D-Georgia), Speaker of the House John McCormack (D-Massachusetts), House Majority Leader Carl Albert (D-Oklahoma), Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-Illinois), Leverett Saltonstall (R-Massachusetts), and House Minority Leader Charles Halleck (R-Indiana) along with Aiken.<sup>41</sup> As well as President Johnson, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara were joined by CIA Director John J. McCone. The House members present had not been told of the 34A missions. Aiken, in an attempt to force McCone to share this secret information with the representatives from the House, asked McCone

<sup>39</sup> "A Measured & Fitting Response" *Time* (August 14, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Herring, p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> Aiken attended at least two other White House meetings dealing with Vietnam during 1964, on May 26 and September 9. Johnson called the May 26 meeting after Senate Minority Leader Dirksen criticized the Administration publicly by stating that White House indecision on Vietnam was "dribbling away both American lives and American prestige in Southeast Asia." Quoted in William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II: 1961-1964* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1986), p. 265. Nine Republican Senators were called to the White House, Everett Dirksen (Illinois), Thomas Kuchel (California), Leverett Saltonstall (Massachusetts), Milton Young (North Dakota), Karl Mundt (South Dakota), Glenn Beall, Bourke Hickenlooper (Iowa), Frank Carlson (Kansas), John Williams (Delaware), as well as Aiken. Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969), Johnson Library, Reel 3, May 26, 1964 and September 9, 1964. Of these Senators, only Carlson would later criticize the administration's hard line in Vietnam.

for information he had on "the provocation, if any" that would have led the North Vietnamese to attempt a second attack. Aiken was also attempting to discover whether any further 34A attacks had taken place, giving Hanoi more reason to retaliate. McCone more than likely went no further than McNamara had on August 3 in clarifying the situation. Further 34A attacks had taken place on the night of August 3-4, information which would not be revealed to the Congress for another four years.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Senator Fulbright, the man Johnson would call upon to shepherd the Tonkin Gulf Resolution through the Congress, was not informed of the DESOTO missions until the following day. McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Adviser, told Fulbright there was no connection between the 34A missions and the presence of the American destroyers in the Gulf. McCone had, in fact, told Johnson, Bundy, Rusk and McNamara at a meeting of the NSC on the 4th that Hanoi was not seeking to provoke a war but was instead "reacting defensively to our attacks on their offshore islands."<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the congressional leaders were not being told the full story, nor was the American public.

In his memoirs Lyndon Johnson did not touch on any discussion among the group that did not center on support for the President's actions. Johnson's account of the meeting focused on the group's examination of the message the President was to deliver on television that night. Johnson wrote that each person "expressed his wholehearted endorsement of our course of action and of the proposed resolution."<sup>44</sup> As Mark Stoler has noted, Johnson was careful to leave out the dissent, particularly that of Senators Aiken and Mansfield.<sup>45</sup> The administration had been aware of the need to placate Aiken and Mansfield by stressing the White House's desire to resist involving the United States more deeply in a military conflict in South Vietnam. This was done in order that passage of a congressional resolution could be won quickly and overwhelmingly. McGeorge Bundy had stressed in June 1964 that a resolution would have to focus on peaceful objectives and a willingness on the part of the administration to accept negotiated solutions "so that we might hope to have the full support of the school of thought headed by Senator Mansfield and

---

<sup>42</sup> Mark A. Stoler, "Aiken, Mansfield and the Tonkin Gulf Crisis: Notes from the Congressional Leadership Meeting at the White House, August 4, 1964," *Vermont History* 50 (1982), pp. 84-85, and David M. Barrett ed., *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station, Texas, 1997), pp. 67-73.

<sup>43</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968: Volume I - Vietnam 1964* (Washington, 1992), p. 611.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Stoler, p. 82.

Senator Aiken and leave ourselves with die-hard opposition from Senator Morse and his very few cohorts."<sup>46</sup>

Mansfield had been made aware of the attacks during a Democratic leadership meeting held with the President on the morning of the fourth. Between this morning session and the evening meeting with the full congressional leadership Mansfield had prepared a memorandum outlining his opposition to retaliation. After conferring with Aiken and Fulbright during the meeting, Mansfield read the memo. Mansfield stressed that the situation was not akin to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Many people had made the connection between the Tonkin Gulf and Cuba but Mansfield pointed out that in this case the Soviet Union was not involved directly. He also mentioned the possibility that China would respond to aggression by the United States by moving against Korea or Formosa. Essentially, Mansfield believed that the United States ran the risk of getting into a shooting war in an area that he felt was not vitally important to the U.S. He mentioned that the United States could simply ignore the attacks, treating them as isolated acts of terror while appealing to the United Nations to organize a conference similar to the 1954 Geneva meeting which dealt with the partition of Vietnam.<sup>47</sup> Aiken, Russell and Saltonstall followed up on this by questioning the wisdom of any action that might provoke the Chinese into responding. Saltonstall and Russell expressed the hope that the United Nations would be consulted to prevent the U.S. from being isolated.<sup>48</sup> Although he worried about Chinese involvement, Saltonstall strongly supported the administration's plan to punish the North Vietnamese and continued to do so through to the end of his term in 1966. Russell's fears concerning Vietnam had been relayed to Johnson but he too supported the administration's resolution proposal.

It is clear that support from the leadership was not as unanimous as Johnson claimed although at the

---

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Stoler, p. 82, and Glenmon, p. 620.

<sup>48</sup> Stoler, pp. 84-85. Russell had expressed serious concerns over the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam in telephone conversations with the President in the first half of 1964. On May 27, 1964, he told Johnson "it frightens me 'cause it's my country involved over there and if we get into there on any considerable scale, there's no doubt in my mind but that the Chinese will be in there and we'd be fighting a danged conventional war against our secondary potential threat and it'd be a Korea on a much bigger scale and a worse scale." Russell knew that the situation posed a great problem for Johnson and his Administration. In a June 11, 1964, conversation he said, "I don't know what the hell to do. I didn't ever want to get messed up down there. I do not agree with those brain trusters who say that this thing has got tremendous strategic and economic value and that we'll lose everything in Southeast Asia if we lose Vietnam....But as a practical matter, we're in there and I don't know how the hell you can tell the American people you're coming out....They'll think that you've just been whipped, you've been ruined, you're scared. It'd be disastrous." Quoted in Michael R. Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York, 1997), p. 367 and p. 403.

same time concerted opposition was absent. Dissent may have been stronger had the congressional participants known the full extent of the 34A and DESOTO actions which were underway but as it was Johnson did not face a particularly hostile group of men that night. The President's actions had, in fact, made congressional opposition a difficult option for these Senators and Congressmen to consider. The President had decided to retaliate against North Vietnam, he was merely telling the leadership rather than consulting with them. Aiken was well aware of this. At the close of the meeting Aiken, in reference to the introduction of the congressional resolution supporting action in Southeast Asia, told Johnson that "by the time you send it up there won't be anything for us to do but support you."<sup>49</sup> Aiken recognized that Congress had been put in a tenuous situation by the administration's plan to introduce the resolution after having already conducted military attacks against North Vietnam. Members of the Congress would be treading on dangerous ground by casting votes that could be construed as voting against American fighting men engaged in combat. Aiken's comment reveals that although he had misgivings about the administration's actions, he was resigned to the fact that, politically, he could not vote against it.

Prior to SFRC hearings on the resolution, a meeting was held in Majority Leader Mansfield's office to discuss how the resolution would be handled by the Senate.<sup>50</sup> Attending from the Senate were Mansfield, Russell, Fulbright, Bourke Hickenlooper (R-Iowa), Saltonstall as well as Aiken and from the House, the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Thomas Morgan (D-Pennsylvania) and the ranking Republican member of that committee Frances Bolton (Ohio). Under Secretary of State George Ball represented the administration. Essentially, these leaders of the House and Senate came together not to discuss and dissect the resolution but to plan how to pass it as quickly as possible. Mansfield insisted that the resolution be introduced exactly as the administration had written it and the group quickly agreed. It was also decided that Fulbright would introduce the resolution with Russell, Hickenlooper and Saltonstall cosponsoring it. A timetable was set that called for joint Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committee hearings on the morning of August 7 followed by introduction of the resolution on that

---

<sup>49</sup> *FRUS*, p. 621.

<sup>50</sup> There is some confusion as to when the meeting took place. William Conrad Gibbons places the meeting on the afternoon of August 5 while Randall Bennett Woods claims the meeting took place on the morning of August 6. Gibbons, p. 304, and Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 354.



afternoon. The group hoped that the resolution would be passed quickly that very same day. At this critical meeting, Aiken raised no objections. Although he had shown his frustration with the manner in which the administration was proceeding with the introduction of the resolution at the August 4 White House meeting, he went along wholeheartedly with the plan to speed the resolution through the Congress. Although voting against the resolution would have had negative political ramifications for Aiken, raising concerns in a private meeting with fellow Senators would not have hurt him nearly as much. Aiken had a chance to voice his fears concerning the resolution but he declined to do so. Aiken's refusal to do so represented a lost opportunity to have a significant and direct impact on the administration's policy in Vietnam, an opportunity that would not present itself again during Lyndon Johnson's time in the White House.

The joint Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committee Hearings on the administration's resolution lasted only one hour and forty minutes. The hearings were held in executive session on the morning of August 6. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk appeared as witnesses. Although some of the committee members raised certain minor objections, only Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) aggressively challenged the administration's version of events and the need for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.<sup>51</sup> McNamara flatly denied that the United States was involved in any offensive military operations involving the South Vietnamese in the Tonkin Gulf and insisted that North Vietnam had launched entirely unprovoked offensive operations against U.S. forces, assertions that were later proven to be untrue.<sup>52</sup> The presentation by McNamara and Rusk satisfied every member of the committees save

---

<sup>51</sup> In an exchange with McNamara Morse said, "Mr. Chairman, my views are pretty well known. I am unalterably opposed to this course of action which, in my judgment, is an aggressive course of action on the part of the United States. I think we are kidding the world if you try to give the impression that when the South Vietnamese naval boats bombarded two islands a short distance off the coast of North Vietnam we were not implicated. I think our whole course of action of aid to South Vietnam satisfies the world that those boats didn't act in a vacuum as far as the United States was concerned. We knew those boats were going up there, and that naval action was a clear act of aggression against the territory of North Vietnam, and our ships were in Tonkin Bay, in international waters, but nevertheless they were in Tonkin Bay to be interpreted as standing cover for naval operations of South Vietnam. I think what happened is that Khanh got us to backstop him in open aggression against the territorial integrity of North Vietnam. I have listened to briefing after briefing and there isn't a scintilla of evidence in any briefing yet that North Vietnam engaged in any military aggression against South Vietnam either with its ground troops or its navy. Sure, there was the vicious infiltration of Communist technique, but the first act of open territorial aggression by way of military operation was South Vietnam naval boats against two North Vietnam island with American naval vessels conveniently standing by as a backstop. I don't think we ought to have been sucked into that kind of an operation. I shall vote against the resolution." U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), 1964, Volume XVI (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1988), pp. 292-293.

<sup>52</sup> In response to a question from Aiken regarding whether U.S. forces were aware that the South Vietnamese were conducting raids in the Tonkin Gulf, McNamara disingenuously stated, "Well, the destroyers, as I said, had no knowledge of it, and I had no knowledge at the time or the exact character of the attacks." *Ibid.*, pp. 294-295. McNamara deftly avoided any mention of American attempts to aid the South Vietnamese in their efforts to inflict damage on North Vietnamese forces in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Morse, and the resolution was quickly approved by a vote of 31-1.<sup>53</sup> Fulbright, Mansfield and Russell asked no questions. The main focus of Aiken's questions revolved around his fear that American actions against North Vietnam could possibly induce the Chinese to join the conflict. McNamara assured the Vermont Republican that the White House had contingency plans ready to be put into effect if this situation presented itself but the administration remained confident that China would remain on the sidelines.<sup>54</sup> Aiken did not, however, raise any questions that related to the wording of the resolution and he dutifully voted to send it out of committee exactly as the White House had wanted.

The resolution itself, which Johnson wanted passed as quickly as possible, was shepherded through the Senate by Fulbright. The resolution outlined what the White House believed were "a series of unprovoked armed attacks in international waters against naval units of the United States" that were "part of a continuous, deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression and subversion carried on against free nations, and particularly against the people of Southeast Asia, by the Communist regime in North Vietnam."<sup>55</sup> In its most important passage, Section 2, the resolution read,

To this end, the Congress supports the determination of the President, as Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States:

- a) to respond instantly with the use of appropriate force to repel any unprovoked attack against the armed forces of the United States and to take such steps as may be necessary to protect these forces and
- b) upon request from any nation in Southeast Asia, to take, consistently with the Charter of the United Nations, all measures including the use of armed forces to assist that nation in the defense of its political independence and territorial integrity against aggression or subversion.<sup>56</sup>

The resolution clearly granted the President vast power to conduct policy as he saw fit in Southeast Asia.

---

<sup>53</sup> Rusk testified that "this resolution, and this consultation which the executive and legislative branches are now having in the course of today, will in no sense be the last contact between the executive and the legislative branches on the problems in Southeast Asia. There will continue to be regular consultations not only with committees but between the President and the congressional leaders, and on a bipartisan basis. That has been the practice of Presidents in this postwar period. Therefore, as the Southeast Asia situation develops, and if it develops, in ways which we cannot now anticipate, of course there will be close and continuous consultation between the President and the leaders of Congress." Quoted in Gibbons, pp. 310-311. In future years the White House would, by its actions, refute the notion that the executive branch would continue to consult the legislative branch concerning its decisions in Southeast Asia. The White House informing members of Congress about policies that had already been decided upon replaced consultation and the legislative branch would have an increasingly difficult time inducing members of the Administration to testify before committees.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), 1964, Volume XVI (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Print. Off., 1988), p. 294. In an executive SFRC session with McNamara and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, on March 26, 1964, Aiken expressed a similar concern, asking the Defense Secretary how China would respond to operations against North Vietnam. McNamara insisted that the Chinese air force was in a weakened condition because of a lack of fuel and a shortage of capable air force personnel. He expressed doubt that the Chinese would intervene but he stated that any Chinese military action would be met with American force, an answer that no doubt troubled Aiken. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 612.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 613.

Fulbright acknowledged that Johnson had been granted the power to commit combat troops to Vietnam if he believed it necessary. The fact that the resolution granted such open-ended powers to the President caused much consternation among some Senators. Fulbright was able to soothe these fears by stressing his belief that the President would not unilaterally introduce ground troops into Vietnam but would instead carefully consult with Congress as further steps were taken.<sup>57</sup>

George Aiken was one of those Senators who voiced worry over the Southeast Asia Resolution, more commonly known as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. During the August 7 debate over the resolution, Aiken detailed his opposition to expanding the war in Vietnam. Aiken made it clear that he had long believed that the administration had been planning an expansion of military operations in the region. Aiken said that he had "been skeptical of the repeated assurances of high government officials that no such expansion was contemplated."<sup>58</sup> Aiken went on to say that he had "repeatedly stated to those officials, including the President of the United States, that I was opposed to an expansion of the war. The decision, however, was not mine to make. The decision, and also the responsibility for expanding such military operations, rest squarely with the President, under the authority delegated to him by the Congress over the years."<sup>59</sup> Aiken's longstanding fear that Congress had allowed its power to erode by ceding its rights and privileges in foreign affairs to the executive branch lay at the heart of his skepticism regarding the resolution. Aiken's criticism was directed as much at his fellow Senators as it was at the White House. The Vermont Republican believed that Congress had surrendered so much of its role in foreign policy that it no longer had the capacity to exert significant control over U.S. policy in international affairs. While lamenting the diminished role of Congress, Aiken also wanted to make it very clear that the decisions regarding Vietnam were being made at the White House.

Ultimately, Aiken did not believe that he could do anything less than support the President while American forces were in harm's way. While once again expressing his misgivings regarding the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam, Aiken outlined the reasons why he would support the resolution. He said,

Mr. President, I am still apprehensive over the outcome of this decision. But, since it has

---

<sup>57</sup> William C. Berman, *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist* (Kent, Ohio, 1988), pp. 26-28.

<sup>58</sup> Congressional Record – Senate, 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 18456.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

been made. I feel that I, as an American citizen, can do no less than support the President in his capacity as leader of our Nation. I believe that our country will be in greater jeopardy if we do not now support his decision. I sincerely hope that the fears I have entertained over the past few months may prove to be groundless. I sincerely hope that the President's action, taken evidently in the belief that vigorous action now will save more lives than it will cost, will prove to be correct.<sup>60</sup>

George Aiken firmly believed that by voting for the resolution, he was not, by any means, giving Lyndon Johnson permission to introduce massive amounts of American ground troops into Vietnam. He hoped that the President would return to Congress for approval of any action that would once again widen the conflict in Southeast Asia. As he later said, Aiken felt that Congress "never intended to have that (resolution) interpreted to mean you could carry it to war with the rest of the world if necessary."<sup>61</sup> As far as Aiken was concerned, the resolution was only intended to give congressional approval to retaliatory attacks against North Vietnamese ships that were attacking Americans in the Tonkin Gulf.<sup>62</sup> Aiken essentially interpreted the resolution very narrowly, while the Johnson administration used the resolution as a device to conduct the war any way they saw fit. Aiken was not unaware of the way the White House can interpret laws to their advantage. According to the Vermonter, the "executive agencies down there (Washington) have good legal staffs and they put them to work to interpret the acts of Congress in a manner which they think will give them some advantages."<sup>63</sup> Aiken made a grave mistake regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and he regretted it in the years that followed. He downplayed the obvious significance of the resolution, simply trusting President Johnson to seek the approval of Congress if the administration decided to expand the American commitment to South Vietnam. The language contained in the resolution gave the White House the authority to conduct the war as it saw fit, and this was plainly evident. Aiken, however, was not alone in disregarding the enormous latitude the resolution gave the White House in dealing with the United States policy in Vietnam.

Less than ten hours were given to debating the resolution in the Senate. It quickly passed by a vote of 88-2, with only Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening (D-Alaska) voting against it. It passed the House by an even more overwhelming margin, 416-0. Senators of every political stripe voted in the affirmative from

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18457.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with George Aiken, 19 October 1978, Aiken Papers, Crate 61, Box 6, Folder 16.

<sup>62</sup> Post-retirement statement on Vietnam, January 1975, Aiken Papers, Crate 61, Box 6, Folder 16.

<sup>63</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, p. 179.

conservative southerners opposed to U.S. involvement to moderate and liberal Democrats and Republicans from all over the country. Those Senators that became leaders of the anti-war movement in later years such as Mansfield, Fulbright, Frank Church (D-Idaho), George McGovern (D-South Dakota), Eugene McCarthy (D-Minnesota), Jacob Javits (R-New York), Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin), Albert Gore (D-Tennessee), John Sherman Cooper (R-Kentucky), Joseph Clark (D-Pennsylvania) and Thurston Morton (R-Kentucky), all voted for the resolution.<sup>64</sup> Although some of these Senators raised pointed questions about the resolution during debate, Fulbright deftly brushed their concerns aside. The Arkansas Democrat, having been assured by Johnson that the White House would consult with Congress before seeking to expand the war any further, insured that any and all amendments to the resolution were excluded. Although Gruening decried the resolution as a virtual declaration of war and Nelson declared that Congress was granting the executive branch a tremendous amount of authority in foreign affairs, the debate was largely dominated by platitudes and tributes to the President for his restraint in dealing with North Vietnam.<sup>65</sup> All of the Senators that became anti-war opponents of Johnson in later years immensely regretted their decision to vote for the resolution.<sup>66</sup>

Lyndon Johnson used the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as a lever to expand the Vietnam War in the years that followed. Aiken's misgivings about the situation in Southeast Asia, voiced publicly and privately in the time leading up to the attack in the Tonkin Gulf, would soon turn into explicit criticism of U.S. policy. While the Vermont Senator joined with numerous colleagues in condemning the actions of the Johnson administration, Aiken's dissent placed him at odds with his own Party. Although not known as a strict

---

<sup>64</sup> Pat Holt, a senior staff member of the Foreign Relations Committee, later offered an assessment of the political motivations and pressures facing Senators on the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees. In an interview he said, "This was early August. Goldwater had been nominated as the Republican candidate for President in July. Goldwater was taking a very hard line about Vietnam, in comparison to which Johnson looked like a model of restraint and moderation. The Democrats on the committees felt much constrained to support a moderate Democratic President, or what looked like a moderate Democratic President, against the onslaughts of this bomb-them-out, shoot-them-up Republican. The Republicans on the committees could scarcely refuse to support this much, and there it was. And the politics of it also were such that Democrats almost had to support the thing, not only for the reason that I mentioned, but because if they didn't, then they would be in the position of knuckling under to this little two-bit communist power in Southeast Asia and that sort of thing." Gibbons, pp. 314-315.

<sup>65</sup> Fulbright emphasized during the debate that he trusted the Administration to consult with Congress even though he conceded that he could not be sure if the resolution placed any limits on the executive branch's discretion in dealing with Vietnam. Johnson had told Fulbright that Goldwater's nomination dictated that he needed to illustrate to the country that he could be tough in dealing with North Vietnam. The possibility of Barry Goldwater in the White House frightened Fulbright and he was more than willing to insure that Johnson got his wish. Woods, p. 353.

<sup>66</sup> George McGovern later termed his vote for the resolution as the one he most regretted of all the votes that he cast in the House and Senate. Frank Church judged his vote a terrible mistake. Fulbright termed the absence of full and extensive SFRC hearings a disaster and a tragic mistake. George McGovern, *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern* (New York, 1977), p. 103-104, and Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting The Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), pp. 183-184, and Woods, pp. 354-355.

partisan. Aiken generally supported Republican initiatives and policies. However, Aiken believed that South Vietnam did not constitute a vital part of American interests, and, further, he believed that committing the United States to a ground war in Asia was foolish and misguided; these concerns overrode his Party loyalty. Aiken's independence, his unquestioned honesty, and his commitment to standing up for what he believed was right led him to become one of the Senate's leading voices of dissent during the Johnson years. The seeds of that dissent were sown in 1964, as the Johnson administration took the first steps towards the introduction of American ground troops in South Vietnam.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *THE UNITED STATES GOES TO WAR*

Between August 1964 and July 1965, George Aiken's objection to United States policy in Southeast Asia grew as the Johnson White House committed more and more American military forces to the defense of South Vietnam. Aiken continued to voice his opinion against continued escalation of hostilities in that Asian land. He did not believe that South Vietnam constituted a vital, strategic area for American interests. At the same time, however, Aiken supported the administration's requests for additional funds for U.S. troops in the field. Aiken's opposition to expanding the American military commitment was certainly genuine but unlike Senators Ernest Gruening, Wayne Morse or Gaylord Nelson, Aiken did not use that power which he had at his disposal, the power to vote against funds for use in the war in Vietnam. Aiken justified this seeming contradiction by stressing his belief that not supporting American troops in the field was an unthinkable option. As a result, while his criticisms of U.S. policy were certainly heard at the White House, Lyndon Johnson could continue to count on George Aiken's vote for support of U.S. troops. Aiken was not alone among Senators in facing this dilemma between opposing U.S. policy and supporting American military personnel. Men such as Mike Mansfield, William Fulbright, Frank Church, Richard Russell, George McGovern and Robert Kennedy struggled to come to terms with their growing uneasiness with presidential decision making in Southeast Asia. Although Aiken decried each administration decision to expand the American commitment to Vietnam, he continued to offer his criticism in measured tones. Aiken believed that he could more effectively voice his dissent if he remained on cordial terms with Lyndon Johnson. For this reason he was reluctant to criticize the White House as vigorously as Morse or Gruening. Ultimately Aiken would realize that his gentle criticism of administration policies was having little effect and he would begin to attack Johnson's decisions more strenuously. In 1965, however, Aiken continued to believe that the President would not allow the United States to become bogged down in a war in Southeast Asia.

As far as the White House was concerned, the Gulf Of Tonkin Resolution could not have come at a better time politically. The resolution was a significant component of Lyndon Johnson's 1964 election success. Every Republican member of Congress voted for passage of the bill, thereby neutralizing the issue of Vietnam. The nearly unanimous endorsement of the President's policies by the United States Congress gave legitimacy to the manner in which Johnson was conducting American foreign policy in Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> Barry Goldwater, the Republican nominee, was unable to make Vietnam a polarizing concern in the presidential campaign. Johnson stressed his desire for peace in the region. The events surrounding the incident in the Tonkin Gulf, and in particular the President's quick response to the North Vietnamese attack, had exempted him from charges that he was soft on Communism. During the campaign Johnson said that "we are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."<sup>2</sup> For George Aiken, however, Vietnam was an issue that had a place in the 1964 campaign.

Aiken viewed Vietnam as a central part of the misconduct of foreign policy being formulated by the Johnson White House. In a statement he issued on September 2, 1964, Aiken stated that "the situation confronting the United States in South Vietnam might be aptly described as 'having a bear by the tail', difficult to hold on and dangerous to let go."<sup>3</sup> He reiterated his belief that officials of the executive branch of government had been issuing optimistic reports on Vietnam, reports, which in his mind had not been supported by facts. According to Aiken "the situation in all Southeast Asia seems to be deteriorating" and he did not "underestimate the predicament in which the administration finds itself for it spells great trouble for us all and the way out becomes less and less clear."<sup>4</sup> After analyzing the troubles facing the United States in Vietnam, Aiken linked the issue to his concerns over American foreign policy in general. He concluded the statement on an aggressive note.

If the Southeast Asia situation were an isolated one, I could be more charitable, but the popularity of the United States government has suffered in so many parts of the world that we must conclude that there are radical difficulties or weaknesses in our foreign policy. While we should always strive for national unity in dealing with foreign nations,

---

<sup>1</sup> George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1986), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, 1983), p. 395.

<sup>3</sup> Transcription for Educational T.V Claude Mahoney, September 2, 1964, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



it is now evident that when the party in power permits our prestige to drop lower and lower, then the matter of foreign policy becomes a perfectly proper campaign issue.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, Aiken had become convinced that Lyndon Johnson's handling of foreign affairs left much to be desired. He was sure that the U.S. was heading in the wrong direction in Vietnam. At this point in time, however, Aiken's criticism remained somewhat muted. He recognized the difficulty the U.S. faced in extracting itself from the conflict in Southeast Asia, it was going to be an arduous task letting go of the "bear's tail". It seems that Aiken was hoping that discussion of these issues during the presidential campaign would serve as a forum for finding answers to these difficult questions. Johnson's campaign would not oblige the Vermonter and the issue was left to simmer until following the election.

While the issue was not discussed extensively by President Johnson during the campaign, members of his administration were debating their next course of action in Vietnam. Increasingly, the White House leaned toward the bombing of North Vietnam. By the end of November a large majority of presidential advisers began to argue vigorously for the use of air power.<sup>6</sup> All that remained was a decision on the severity of the bombing campaign, the question of whether or not to bomb the North was all but decided. The press began to print articles detailing the debate going on within the administration concerning Southeast Asia. A bleak picture of the state of affairs in South Vietnam was also beginning to emerge in the press. Details of the latest government coup and the inability of the current regime to provide any more stability in Saigon were provided along with the disturbing news that the Vietcong had steadily increased their strength in the South, to the point where they controlled, to some extent or another, over half of South Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> The situation in Vietnam had never looked as bad for the United States.

George Aiken shared the sense of unease that was growing about Vietnam. In response to a letter from a constituent he wrote that "there is no doubt about it - the situation in Vietnam is a mess and is getting worse. I have made it clear that I am opposed to the expansion of military operations in Vietnam because of the dangers of a general war."<sup>8</sup> Aiken's conviction that the war in Vietnam was an increasing disaster was shared by his view that the White House was not seeking the advice and consent of the Congress. In

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Herring, pp. 124-125.

<sup>7</sup> "Vietnam: Never Grimmer. Chaos in Saigon, Uncertainty in Washington" *Newsweek* (December 7, 1964), p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Aiken to Mr. John Wires, 26 December 1964, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 8.

the same letter he wrote, "I wish the American people would be told the facts - or at least the Congress should be told the truth. We are not kept adequately informed."<sup>9</sup> As 1964 drew to a close Aiken's dual fears, that the United States would increase its military commitments and that the White House would unilaterally take this decision, were increasing. They were to be realized early in 1965.

Aiken's doubts about the direction of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia were not shared by many Republicans in 1965. Although there were some members of the Republican Party calling for restraint in Vietnam the overall tone of the Party was more aggressive than even that of the White House. Many Republicans criticized the Johnson administration for not pursuing victory more forcefully in Vietnam. Republican leaders in Congress, Everett Dirksen in the Senate and Gerald Ford in the House, spoke for the GOP in offering the criticism that American power was not being used in the most effective manner. The near unanimity that existed among Congressional Republicans for continued support of South Vietnam was not as evident when the question shifted towards the level of criticism to be used against the Johnson administration. The Republicans were torn between wanting to criticize the White House for not being aggressive enough in waging war and their desire to continue the post-war bipartisan foreign policy consensus that existed in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Party leaders outside of Congress were less reticent in calling for more aggressive action. Former President Dwight Eisenhower, who met regularly with Lyndon Johnson to discuss Vietnam, questioned whether the White House was doing everything possible to prosecute the war successfully. Eisenhower attempted to pressure Johnson into a more hawkish stance by calling for constant pressure in the air war, stressing the need for the attacks to be carried out more aggressively in North Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> His former vice-president, Richard Nixon, joined Eisenhower in underlining the need for more air strikes. Nixon, in the midst of a campaign to rehabilitate his image for a possible run at the Presidency in 1968, issued a demand for air strikes directed against supply lines feeding Communist activity in South Vietnam.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Terry Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961-1968*, (New York, 1986), pp. 78-82.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Eisenhower, however, toned down his public criticism of Johnson as 1965 progressed, stating that "any inroads in supporting him would be a disservice to the United States."<sup>13</sup> Republicans were less reluctant to attack the administration in July when whispers that the White House was willing to accept a coalition government in South Vietnam began to appear in the press.

Dirksen stressed the need to continue American efforts in the region otherwise the United States would have to admit that a country as small as North Vietnam had forced it to capitulate, a situation he felt would lead to a massive diminution of American prestige. Ford urged that the White House seek more than a settlement with the North Vietnamese and congressman Melvin Laird called for a victory over Communist insurgency and a commitment to drive the Communists from Vietnam. Richard Nixon called on the White House to increase air and sea attacks on North Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> The administration's introduction of large numbers of U.S. ground troops into Vietnam in July 1965 allayed Republican fears. The GOP continued its pressure on the White House throughout the remainder of the year. In early 1966 Dirksen, in response to the bombing pause and a Johnson peace offensive, urged the administration to accept nothing less than a complete victory before it began peace negotiations.<sup>15</sup>

George Aiken became more and more disturbed by these Republican calls for expanding the war in Southeast Asia. In a speech in the Senate June 30, 1965, Aiken stressed his hope that the GOP would "not acquire the title of War Party."<sup>16</sup> The Vermonter expressed concern that Johnson would be pressured into widening the war in Vietnam, a prospect he found distasteful. He made it clear that he had, unlike his Republican colleagues, opposed the President's moves towards expanding the conflict. He called on Johnson to resist the pleas for greater U.S. military involvement, emphasizing that the best policy the American government could pursue was peace. For Aiken, the pressure being put upon the White House would lead it to make only greater mistakes than it already had. He implored the President to show courage in resisting policies, which could lead the United States down the road to a large-scale war in Southeast Asia. Almost alone among Republicans, Aiken protested against the Johnson administration's

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> *Congressional Record - Senate*, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 15320.

inexorable slide toward the commitment of massive numbers of American ground troops in Vietnam during 1965. He consistently voiced his opposition to escalating the conflict, stressing the need for peace. His was a lone dissenting voice in contrast to the Republican clarion calls for greater U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Eventually, as the war in Vietnam became increasingly unpopular in the United States, Aiken would be joined by some of his Republican Senate colleagues in opposing the conflict. For these Republicans, the road to dissent had been made smoother by Aiken's early and insistent criticisms of U.S. policy. Aiken's position as the dean of Senate Republicans and his respected place in the Party gave his opinions weight and helped him serve as an example for Senators such as Jacob Javits, Thurston Morton, Clifford Case, John Sherman Cooper and Charles Percy as they came out against the war.

At the beginning of 1965, the debate over what steps were to be taken in Vietnam remained, for the most part, an internal administration discussion. Within the circle of advisers Johnson had chosen there was near unanimity for increasing military pressure, the questions centered on how aggressive this action should be. Only one administration official vigorously dissented, Undersecretary of State George Ball. Ball argued that there was no proof that demonstrated that air power would pressure Hanoi to desist its insurgency in the South. Ball raised the specter of Hanoi responding to air attacks by pouring its almost unlimited manpower into the South. Ball envisioned a situation where the United States would be compelled to introduce massive American ground forces into South Vietnam to counter Hanoi's moves, leading to a long, drawn out conflict.<sup>17</sup> William Bundy shared Ball's fear that military action was likely to lead to a long-term commitment, writing that it was "inherently likely to stretch out and to be subject to major pressures both within the US and internationally."<sup>18</sup> Bundy, however, like most of Johnson's advisers, rationalized his doubts because he believed that the most pressing concern was saving Vietnam, whatever the costs. Ball's voice was heard but largely ignored, a lone dove in a sea of more hawkish advisers.

Lyndon Johnson was not experienced in the field of foreign affairs. His great interest was domestic

---

<sup>17</sup> Herring, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in VanDeMark, p. 29.

policy and his dream was the creation of a Great Society. The President wanted to insure that Congress passed his domestic program. Dealing with Congress was where he was most comfortable, dealing with Ho Chi Minh was beyond his field of expertise. Johnson saw Vietnam through the prism of domestic politics. He was trapped by his view of recent American history. He feared that if he let South Vietnam fall to the communists he would be treated like Harry Truman and Dean Acheson were treated when China was 'lost' during Truman's administration. Johnson, however, also believed that war was the death knell for periods of great reform, citing the Spanish-American war as the reason for the end of the populist spirit, World War I as the end of Wilson's New Freedom and World War II as the end of the New Deal. He believed that conservatives in Congress would use the war as an excuse for not supporting Johnson's domestic initiatives. Johnson recounted his dilemma, as he saw it, in 1970,

I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved - the Great Society - in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. All my programs. All my hopes to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. All my dreams to provide education and medical care to the browns and the blacks and the lame and the poor. But if I left that and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.<sup>19</sup>

Lyndon Johnson lacked the courage to pull the United States out of Vietnam at the moment when it was still possible. The political will that he admirably displayed in choosing to propose and pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was nowhere to be seen on the issue of Southeast Asia. Johnson had been willing to place the prestige of his office on insuring passage of the two greatest legislative achievements of the civil rights movement, incurring the wrath of conservatives in Congress, but he was not prepared to extricate the United States from the morass that Vietnam represented. Johnson's reading of history was narrowly confined to the effect that Truman's China decisions had on his domestic standing. Vietnam had its own unique history but the President was unwilling or unable to examine it in its own right.

Johnson did not have to go very far back in history to see the problems inherent in fighting a war in Vietnam. The American government had pledged massive amounts of aid to the French in their futile

---

<sup>19</sup> Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York, 1976), p. 263.

attempt to defeat Vietnamese nationalism, labeled Communism, in the early 1950s. By 1954 the French had suffered a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu, leading them to pull their forces out of Vietnam, a land which was once a French colony. Johnson was not alone in his inability to view Vietnam as anything less than a front line battleground in the effort to contain Communism. The vast majority of his advisers were unable to see that the government had elements of nationalism as well as communism. The war in Vietnam was a civil war, with Hanoi unwilling to accept anything less than the unification of its country, North and South. Tragically, the American presence in Vietnam was nothing more than a delaying tactic, Vietnam was united in 1975, after years of bloodshed and the deaths of thousands of people, American and Vietnamese.

Johnson's advisers were also fervent believers in the domino theory. China had exploded a nuclear weapon in October 1964 and this heightened the fear that the Chinese were a threat to the security of all of Asia. The American government also viewed communism as a monolithic force, with every Marxist government striving for the same thing, the destruction of capitalism in concert with their communist brothers. This view disregarded the traditional animosity that Vietnam had shown towards China throughout its history. Over the course of centuries, Chinese attempts to subjugate the Vietnamese had been met by the same reaction that French and American interference in the affairs of Vietnam had received, violent resistance. American officials were unable to recognize that the likelihood existed that Vietnam would, in fact, serve not as a conduit for Chinese domination of Southeast Asia but as a buffer zone.

American officials refused to believe that the United States would suffer the same fate as the French. The belief that American might would overwhelm a country as small as North Vietnam was prevalent in government circles and in United States society as well. Americans, by and large, believed that superior U.S. firepower would overcome any difficulties faced by American troops. In this respect, the problems associated with fighting a war against a guerrilla army were not fully considered. Civilian officials did not share the belief that many American Army generals held, that the United States would have to commit itself to a long engagement in Vietnam. The White House hoped for a quick, decisive blow that would end

the war in a hurry. The reality of guerrilla warfare was entirely different, and what began as a hoped for quick knockout soon developed into a war of attrition.

Lyndon Johnson's hope and expectation that the war would be over quickly once American might was brought to bear led him to commit the fatal error of not fully informing the American public or Congress about the escalations that the administration was considering. Johnson stressed to his advisers the need to follow a policy of only revealing the barest essentials of U.S. policy without resorting to blatant lying.<sup>20</sup> This strategy of duplicity meant that the American people were led into a war without their knowledge or consent. Ironically, support for preventing the victory of communism in Vietnam was high in late 1964 and early 1965 but Johnson never explicitly told the American people of his plans. His almost hysterical fear that committing the United States to a war in Asia would cripple his domestic policies prevented him from seeking approval for his foreign policy initiatives. In the end, this credibility gap between what the administration was telling Americans and what it was actually doing would destroy the Johnson Presidency.

In early 1965, the Administration, in response to renewed attacks by North Vietnamese forces on U.S. positions in South Vietnam, initiated a major bombing campaign against North Vietnam. At a meeting of the National Security Council on February 8, attended by congressional leaders, Johnson gave approval to the bombing campaign, describing it as a means of countering Communist aggression "without escalating the war".<sup>21</sup> Senate minority Leader Everett Dirksen asked Johnson what he could reveal to the press, the President urged him not to reveal that the United States was broadening the war.

The bombing campaign that Johnson had given approval to, Operation ROLLING THUNDER, would, with periodic pauses, continue throughout the remainder of his Presidency. This drastic change in U.S. policy was initiated without the knowledge of the American people. The U.S. would no longer simply respond to attacks, it would initiate attacks against North Vietnam. Tragically, the new Soviet Prime Minister, Aleksei Kosygin, had been in Hanoi at the time of the Pleiku attack, with the apparent goal of persuading the Hanoi government to consider negotiations with the Americans. North Vietnamese

---

<sup>20</sup> Karnow, p. 414.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York, Oxford, 1991), p. 68.

leaders, after the U.S. air strikes, claimed that they were victims of American aggression, worthy of total support from the Communist powers. Ten days after Kosygin's return to Moscow, Soviet surface-to-air missiles began to arrive in North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese may have planned the attack to coincide with the Premier's visit, hoping to draw an American reaction.<sup>22</sup> Johnson unwittingly played a part in sabotaging what may have been a significant opportunity for peace.

Johnson had accepted the recommendation of his aides to initiate sustained bombing attacks. He did not, however, accept the proposal that the administration inform the U.S. public. This would prove to be one of the grave errors of his Presidency. After the bombing campaign began it took on a momentum of its own, leading to greater attacks and eventually, the introduction of American ground troops into Vietnam. Johnson's decision to open this Pandora's box of air strikes soon escalated into a point of no return for American commitments. The United States took over the war in Vietnam. The Johnson administration would soon find itself fighting a losing battle over an ever-increasing credibility gap with the American people. It was difficult to convince Americans that the Johnson White House was being honest when the United States had been dragged, unwittingly, into the chaos of a major ground war in Southeast Asia.

George Aiken believed that the bombing of North Vietnam was a grave mistake. Aiken felt that the administration's contention that bombing would slow the progress of infiltration of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese troops was erroneous. The Vermont Senator was convinced that bombing North Vietnam would not induce Hanoi to surrender, it would instead have the opposite effect of stiffening their resolve. In 1968 Aiken said that the administration had failed to understand that the North Vietnamese would react in much the same way as Americans would if they were attacked from the air, namely it would increase their desire to defend themselves and to strike back.<sup>23</sup> At the time, however, Aiken was muted in his criticism. The consideration that the administration was giving to a sustained bombing campaign did not elicit a comment from Aiken. Only at the end of the month did Aiken voice his disagreement with the administration. This opposition came over a separate issue, the State Department's

---

<sup>22</sup> Karnow, pp. 413-414.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson Library, George Aiken Oral History, October 10, 1968, p. 8.



release of a white paper on U.S. policy in Vietnam. Aiken said that the statement was "part of a plan to condition the American people for what might come. I think that's customary when there's a danger of war breaking out on a large scale."<sup>24</sup> At this critical moment in the expansion of U.S. involvement in the war in Southeast Asia, Aiken remained, for the most part, restrained in his criticism of President Johnson. Aiken recognized, as his February 28 statement indicates, that the threat existed that a large-scale war would soon break out, but his voice was quiet. It would not remain so for very long, but he had not spoken at a crucial juncture.

Aiken gave a major address on the United Nations in the Senate on March 25.<sup>25</sup> In this speech Aiken made clear his opposition to the bombing campaign and fleshed out his belief that the UN was vital to the peaceful conclusion of hostilities in Southeast Asia, a theme which he would return to repeatedly throughout the remainder of the Johnson administration. At the beginning of his speech Aiken said that "if the current crisis in Vietnam is escalated into total war, a course to which I am utterly opposed, some kind of negotiation must ultimately take place - when or where I do not know. If military forces are to be withdrawn, if liquidation in blood is to be avoided, there must be some international presence to police the terms of whatever agreement may be reached. I could not agree more with those who say that the Vietnamese conflict cries out for United Nations attention."<sup>26</sup> The ostensible goal of the speech, however, was Aiken's' fervent attempt to alert the American people as well as the Johnson administration to the fact that the United Nations was too weak and ineffectual to play an important role in any peace settlement, a situation for which Aiken believed the United States bore a great deal of blame.

Aiken traced the crux of the problem in the United Nations to the financing of peacekeeping operations in the Congo in 1962. Russia, France and other nations had refused to pay UN assessments for this operation on the grounds that they opposed the mission. The United States government had then insisted that these countries be denied a vote in the General Assembly under the terms of Article 19 of the organization's Charter. Aiken stated plainly that the position of the American government was extremely

---

<sup>24</sup> *Evening Star*, March 1, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 15.

<sup>25</sup> Aiken met at the White House with President Johnson and McGeorge Bundy on March 23. He requested the meeting in order to inform Johnson of his intention to give a Senate speech imploring the President to take the initiative in breathing new life into the UN. *Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969)*, Johnson Library, Reel 4, March 23, 1965.

<sup>26</sup> *Congressional Record - Senate*, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 5925.

hypocritical because it was apparent that the United States would object vociferously if it were assessed for peacekeeping operations that it opposed. As a result of these American led financial machinations, Aiken said that the UN was facing a serious debt problem because so many members had refused to pay for peacekeeping operations to which they were opposed. The United States had exacerbated the problem by financing the UN through questionable practices, thereby allowing the issue to be delayed again and again.

Aiken wanted to insure that the United Nations survived. He believed that the United States had to play a pivotal role in helping the UN once again achieve a degree of respectability, which would allow it to play an important part in finding solutions to worldwide conflicts. He concluded his speech by saying, in part,

I want the United Nations to survive. I want it available as an instrument capable of action in trouble spots wherever they may arise. If the United Nations is ever to have a future, it must stop avoiding issues on the theory that if they are avoided they will go away. On the part of the United States, this means acceptance of the fact that it is unwilling and unable to force the United Nations to abide by article 19. It means acceptance of the fact that the United States is not willing to have article 19 applied to itself when its vital interests are involved. It means that the United States must admit frankly that once again it is meeting UN expenses indirectly by supporting activities such as that of the United Nations Special Fund, from which funds in turn are borrowed to meet other expenses of the United Nations. In short, this Nation needs a clean and forthright statement of what the United Nations means to the United States in 1965, as distinct from repetitions of what it meant in 1945. Only by this clearing of the decks will it be possible for the United Nations to proceed in a constructive way to get its financial affairs in order so that, in terms of the bureaucracy, it may once again become a viable institution for peace. The time has come for the President of the United States to cut through the underbrush of procrastination and mutable principles that have enveloped the United Nations. He should instruct his representative to the United Nations to reconcile our position with the Soviet and French position on the assessment of members for peacekeeping functions - a view which may shock some, but a position which would definitely be in our own national interests.<sup>27</sup>

Immediately following Aiken's address, the Vermont Senator and Majority Leader Mansfield engaged in a protracted discussion of the UN and its relationship to the conflict in Southeast Asia. Mansfield asked Aiken what the UN could accomplish in regards to Vietnam if it was adequately financed. Aiken once again stressed his belief that the UN was the only organization that could enforce any agreement ending hostilities in Vietnam. Aiken stated further that "I feel if there were a strong, reliable, nonbankrupt United

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5927.

Nations at this time, there would be a greater willingness to negotiate between the warring parties, the warring philosophies in Southeast Asia, than there is today. I feel that one reason they continue fighting today is that they do not know what the end would be if they started negotiations, provided there were no other body capable of supervising the carrying out of terms of any agreement which might be reached."<sup>28</sup> Upon further questioning from Mansfield, Aiken outlined his belief that the situation in South Vietnam had deteriorated badly following the assassination of President Diem and that the United States would be wise to scale back its military support and instead focus its attention on economic support. Aiken also discounted the domino theory, saying further that "North Vietnam has every reason in the world not to wish to become a satellite of Red China; and that she will not become one unless the United States forces her to become one. But, if we continue raids over North Vietnam and continue the use of the weapons which we have been using, apparently more or less indiscriminately, we may force North Vietnam to call on China for Chinese troops by the million."<sup>29</sup>

In his speech and in his exchange with Mansfield Aiken laid out many of the ideas which he held in relation to the conflict in Southeast Asia. Above all else, Aiken feared that the hostilities would expand into a general war pitting the United States against China and the Soviet Union. Aiken believed that this was an unimaginable risk to take because of the existence of nuclear weapons and the destruction that would be unleashed were they to be used. Any action which could precipitate steps towards nuclear war were anathema to Aiken, therefore he was adamantly opposed to the bombing of North Vietnam. In his March 25 exchange with Mansfield, Aiken made his opposition to the bombing known, albeit through the use of indirect language. Aiken's solution to preventing general war in Vietnam revolved around the use of the United Nations as a conduit to peace negotiations and enforcement. For this reason, the Vermont Senator outlined his belief that curing the financial ills of the UN was a critical step towards peace in the region.<sup>30</sup>

Four weeks after Aiken's UN address, Mike Mansfield rose in the Senate to warn that a peaceful

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5928.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Many Senators shared Aiken's belief that the United Nations could serve as a conduit to peace in Vietnam. Wayne Morse continually urged Johnson to turn the problem of Vietnam over to the UN. Frank Church also advocated using the UN to achieve peace in Vietnam.

solution to the Southeast Asia conflict had to be arrived at soon lest the risk of a general war reach dangerous proportions. Aiken followed Mansfield's speech with brief comments of his own. Aiken echoed Mansfield's warning, saying that "it is plainly evident now that unless reason returns to the world we will be headed into the most devastating conflict the world has ever known, and we will not come out of it covered with glory, no matter who wins, because no one can win that kind of war."<sup>31</sup> Aiken once again stressed his opposition to the bombing, claiming incredulity at the folly of sending massive air strikes against North Vietnam. Aiken said that he believed that bombing would stiffen the resolve of Hanoi, commenting that U.S. efforts to destroy North Vietnam's ability to wage war would serve only to heighten that nation's hatred of America. Aiken ended his remarks by saying, prophetically, "I believe it is plainly evident that unless this conflict is stopped, whatever history will be left to record will show a very black page."<sup>32</sup> Aiken had once again made apparent his fear that the conflict would escalate into a nuclear war.

The day after these remarks, April 22, Aiken called for a halt to the bombing in an interview with the *Washington Evening Star*. Aiken was joining colleagues such as Mike Mansfield, Frank Church and George McGovern in calling for a bombing halt over North Vietnam.<sup>33</sup> Aiken said that he had opposed the bombing since it began and that he believed that as long as it continued there was no chance for a cease-fire in the region. While the Vermont Republican made it clear that he was fervently opposed to any further escalation of the conflict he also emphasized that he was not calling for a sudden withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam. Aiken recognized that the United States had an obligation to aid the government in Saigon but he stressed that seeking a military solution to the problem was a strategy doomed to failure. In this interview and one he gave two days later to the *Vermont Sunday News* Aiken likened North Vietnam to the United States following Pearl Harbor. He told the *Evening Star* that "It is very obvious that the continuous and almost indiscriminate bombings will not put the North Vietnamese in a mood to negotiate. We did not think of negotiations when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. It made

---

although not as forcefully as Aiken or Morse. Mason Drukman, *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography* (Portland, Oregon, 1997), pp. 414-415, and Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), p. 208.

<sup>31</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 8125.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Herring, p. 133.

us furious and inspired the whole nation with a determination to fight back.”<sup>34</sup>

On April 29, in a speech before the Vermont State Legislature, Aiken again addressed the issue of Vietnam. Aiken qualified his April 22 remarks concerning U.S. obligations to South Vietnam by noting that commitments had been made to the government of President Diem, adding that close to a dozen governments had assumed power in Saigon since that time. Aiken stressed that the country was now, militarily and politically, in turmoil. United States economic assistance had helped somewhat but initiative in that area had been circumspect. Aiken outlined his fears of nuclear war to the assembled Vermont politicians. He warned that those who were calling for a showdown with the Communist World did not realize that victory in any such conflict would be hollow at best. He said that “it is incredible that the United States and Russia, who jointly hold the key to the situation, will permit any holocaust that would likely wipe out half the population of either country. It is equally incredible that the United States after the experience of the French at Dien Bien Phu and our own experience in Korea will undertake a ground war involving several hundred million people on either side”, adding, rather sardonically, that “the situation boils down to this: there either will be a war or there won’t be. If there is no nuclear war, you won’t need to worry. If there is a nuclear war, you won’t be able to worry anyway.”<sup>35</sup>

During the initial stages of Operation ROLLING THUNDER, Aiken made his opposition to the bombing known in a forceful and direct manner. The Vermonter also stressed his fervent belief that the United Nations had to be employed if a suitable peace settlement was to be reached. Aiken did not, however, offer any concrete proposal that would bring the war to an end. Aiken’s faith in the United Nations as a peace instrument was naive in some respects. Aiken never considered the fact that negotiating a peace pact would require the active participation of the Hanoi government. While he discounted the idea that North Vietnam was on the verge of becoming a Chinese satellite without the intervention of the United States, Aiken did assume that Hanoi was merely a pawn in the larger Cold War

---

<sup>34</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 15. Aiken was correct in his assessment of the impact of American bombing on the morale of North Vietnam. The determination of the leadership in Hanoi to continue the war remained unaffected by the American raids. The North Vietnamese people displayed a remarkable resiliency towards resisting the effects of the bombing. Ironically, the bombing campaign heightened nationalist feelings among the population to the point where even those who disliked living under Communist rule joined their countrymen in resisting American attacks. In general, the North Vietnamese accepted the sacrifices needed to resist the bombing campaign and the American goal of destroying morale in North Vietnam through repeated raids proved to be a complete failure. Karnow, pp. 458-459, and Herring, p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> Address to the Vermont State Legislature, April 29, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 6.

game between the United States and the Soviet Union. Aiken did not recognize the fact that it was simply not a matter of Moscow telling Hanoi to desist in its armed struggle. The government of North Vietnam remained determined to continue prosecuting the war, no matter what its allies in Moscow and Beijing desired.<sup>36</sup> Aiken placed paramount importance on resurrecting the United Nations in the belief that merely putting the organization back on its feet would get the ball rolling towards a settlement. The Vermont Senator did not offer a process through which peace could be achieved, placing instead all of his faith in the belief that a viable UN was the first, and most important, step towards the cessation of hostilities in Southeast Asia.

Although Lyndon Johnson received advice from people outside his administration, his most important advisers remained Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. The three men, along with the President, formed the core of what was known as the "Tuesday Lunch" group. At these meetings, the three advisers would present the President with one consensus position, often worked out beforehand. As a result the four men held much the same views regarding Vietnam throughout 1964 and 1965. Johnson was not a man open to dissenting points of view, he wanted a common front presented to him. For this reason, George Ball's views, although given a hearing, were, for the most part, ignored. Ball came to serve as the devil's advocate in White House meetings, allowing the President to claim that he was listening to dissenting viewpoints. Their relationship was not affected because Ball was fulfilling a role given to him with Johnson's blessing.<sup>37</sup> The same cannot be said, however, for others who dissented from Johnson's common front.

Vice President Hubert Humphrey was the victim of Lyndon Johnson's wrath during the early 1965 debates on initiating the bombing campaign. At one of the National Security meetings Humphrey voiced his opposition to retaliation bombing. As Humphrey recalled it, he was particularly concerned because of Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. Humphrey's views, like those of George Ball, were ignored. They served only to irritate Johnson. As Vice President under John Kennedy, Johnson had stuck to a policy of never disagreeing with the President publicly and not offering recommendations in meetings without being

---

<sup>36</sup> Herring, p. 148.

<sup>37</sup> Karnow, p. 404.

asked. He would convey his thoughts to Kennedy in one on one meetings.<sup>38</sup> Humphrey's offering of frank dissent therefore annoyed Johnson immensely.

Johnson became more annoyed with Humphrey when the Vice President sent a long, detailed memo to the President on February 15, 1965, outlining his opposition to escalating hostilities in Vietnam. Humphrey detailed the reasons for his dissent, which were largely related to domestic politics. He stressed the risks that a drawn out conflict in Southeast Asia would have on Johnson's domestic programs. Humphrey believed that the public did not fully understand why the United States was intervening to save an unstable government in Saigon and that support for the war would soon disintegrate. He wrote that,

It is always hard to cut losses. But the Johnson Administration is in a stronger position to do so now than any Administration in this century. 1965 is the first year of minimum political risk for the Johnson Administration. Indeed it is the first year when we can face the Vietnam problem without being preoccupied with the political repercussions from the Republican right. As indicated earlier, our political problems are likely to come from new and different sources (Democratic liberals, independents, labor) if we pursue an enlarged military policy very long.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that traditional Democratic constituencies would abandon the White House and jeopardize Great Society programs shook Johnson's belief that conservatives constituted the President's main enemies. The memo led Johnson to momentarily question the wisdom of the bombing campaign but his resolve was soon strengthened by another McGeorge Bundy memo stressing his contention that Vietnam was on the verge of total collapse. In the end, Humphrey's memo served only to delay Johnson in his decision to initiate ROLLING THUNDER for a matter of hours. Johnson punished Humphrey by seeing to it that the Vice President was banished from participation in Vietnam councils for largely the remainder of 1965. Humphrey later "persuaded himself that Johnson was right, and emerged as the leading spokesman for the president's course in Vietnam."<sup>40</sup> Humphrey's conversion to war hawk would haunt him for the rest of his political career. The entire memo was included in Humphrey's autobiography, taking up five pages. Humphrey seemingly wanted to make it clear that he made his opposition to the war clear in its initial stages and that his later support for it was simply a Vice President showing loyalty to his leader.

Majority Leader Mike Mansfield attended more of these meetings on initiating a bombing campaign

---

<sup>38</sup> Barrett, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Hubert H. Humphrey, *The Education of a Public Man: My Life and Times* (New York, 1976), p. 323.

<sup>40</sup> VanDeMark, pp. 73-75.

than any other member of Congress. At the first meeting following the North Vietnamese attack on the American base at Pleiku on February 6, Mike Mansfield was the only person present who disagreed with the decision to retaliate. Even George Ball, the most adamant administration dove, agreed with the need for air strikes. At the close of the meeting, Mansfield looked directly at Johnson and said, with passion, that the "attack has opened many eyes. We are not now in a penny ante game. It appears that the local populace in South Vietnam is not behind us, or else the Vietcong could not have carried out their surprise attack". commenting further that "I would negotiate. I would not hit back. I would get into negotiations."<sup>41</sup> Johnson reacted angrily to Mansfield's dissent, tersely responding that "we have kept our gun over the mantel and our shells in the cupboard for a long time now, and what was the result? They are killing our men while they sleep in the night. I can't ask our American soldiers out there to continue to fight with one hand tied behind their backs."<sup>42</sup>

Mansfield, stung by the aggressive nature of Johnson's dismissal of the Senator's argument, remained largely silent in meetings over the next few days. He continued to inundate the White House with memos detailing his opposition to bombing reprisals. He implored Johnson to ask the United Nations to deal with the situation, stressing the need to open direct discussions with China and the Soviet Union at the same time. Mansfield's private dissent continued at this level as the administration continued along the path to the commitment of large numbers of American ground troops in the first half of 1965. Mansfield's pleas for restraint went unheeded by the White House. Although Johnson respected Mansfield, as an outsider, his influence with the administration remained limited. Mansfield was not alone, other Senators who shared his doubts about the wisdom of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia met with a similar reaction from Lyndon Johnson.

The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William Fulbright of Arkansas, began to have doubts about America's policy in South Vietnam by the latter part of 1964.<sup>43</sup> These doubts increased as the Johnson administration began to introduce more American forces into Vietnam during 1965.

---

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1993), p. 18, and Gregory Allen Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1995), p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Olson, p. 142.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Terry describes Aiken and Fulbright as having a good working relationship. Terry claims that Aiken, the gnarled, earthy Senator from Vermont, was a little bit bemused by Fulbright and his Oxford airs. Terry, interview with author.



Johnson's April 7 Johns Hopkins speech encouraged Fulbright; he saw it as a serious effort by the White House to find a non-military solution to Vietnam. Johnson pledged that his administration was prepared for unconditional negotiations and that the United States would be willing to provide a billion dollars in order to construct a regional development program along the lines of the American TVA. Johnson, however, made it clear that his ultimate objective remained an independent, non-communist South Vietnam.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in late July, as the administration was considering a large-scale commitment of American ground forces to South Vietnam Fulbright met with Johnson. At the meeting the President described what he deemed the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. He then proceeded to proclaim that the United States could not shrink from its commitments. America was in for the long haul, perhaps six or seven years. Fulbright was stunned, he felt that he had been betrayed. The Arkansan had felt that Johnson was working towards a peaceful solution, he now discovered to his horror that the President envisioned a war lasting for years. Fulbright's break with Johnson over Vietnam was complete.<sup>45</sup>

The presence of John Sparkman and in particular Richard Russell at a July 27 meeting in Mansfield's office concerning the commitment of American ground troops underscored the depth of dissatisfaction in the Senate for Johnson's Vietnam policy. Russell, a conservative Democrat from Georgia, had served as Lyndon Johnson's mentor in the Senate. The two had remained close friends even through the bruising battles over the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. Russell, as Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, had supported Johnson's Vietnam policies in 1964. By January 1965, however, Russell had called publicly for a reevaluation of American policy in Vietnam. In early February he advised Johnson not to allow the U.S. to become more involved in Vietnam. As Johnson came closer to an all out military commitment, Russell annoyed the President by saying on national TV that it was highly likely that Ho Chi Minh would win an election for leader of South Vietnam if a vote were held.<sup>46</sup> He reiterated that the area was not important strategically to the United States, commenting further that he doubted the validity of the domino effect. Demonstrating the volatility of opinion on Vietnam, Russell had, by the end of 1965, begun calling for a far more aggressive military response in Vietnam. Russell "urged a major effort by

<sup>44</sup> Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 368.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>46</sup> John A. Goldsmith, *Colleagues: Richard B. Russell and his Apprentice, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Washington, 1993), p. 124.

U.S. and South Vietnamese forces to knock out the North Vietnamese port of Haiphong.<sup>47</sup> Russell's criticism of U.S. policy as not forceful enough revealed the breadth of dissension which had arisen in the United States but the main body of attacks on Johnson continued to be heard from more liberal members of that body.

Fulbright had joined Aiken and Mansfield in questioning the direction of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. The number of Senators with dovish views on the war continued to grow. Some, such as Democratic Senators Ernest Gruening of Alaska and Wayne Morse of Oregon consistently opposed United States policy in Southeast Asia. Gruening considered the hostilities in Vietnam to be a civil war. Gruening believed, as Fulbright came to in 1965, that a Ho government in Vietnam would have served as a bulwark against China. He was not a believer in the Cold War axiom that the fall of Vietnam could lead to communist governments in all of Southeast Asia, and then perhaps India, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand until, as he later wrote, the United States would be "fighting them (communists) on the beaches of California!"<sup>48</sup> Gruening continued to criticize administration policy, stressing that contrary to White House claims, the U.S. was the aggressor in the war. The Alaska Senator continued to support President Johnson's domestic programs but he never wavered in his belief that the U.S. should leave Vietnam. He urged Johnson, in a private meeting in August 1965, to use the United Nations as a platform for achieving a cease-fire in order to withdraw all U.S. forces. Johnson politely, but firmly, rejected Gruening's ideas.<sup>49</sup> Gruening was not taken seriously by the Johnson administration. His reputation as a Senate gadfly meant that, as he acknowledged in his autobiography, the press largely ignored his prophetic warnings about U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Wayne Morse of Oregon fell into roughly the same category as Gruening. Morse's reputation in the Senate had deteriorated since his arrival in Washington, to the point where he was considered a "sanctimonious bore, a garrulous orator whose gravel voice would drone on over trivia."<sup>50</sup> His colleagues in the Senate largely ignored Morse; as a result his impassioned opposition to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>48</sup> Ernest Gruening, *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (New York, 1973), p. 466.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 478-480.

<sup>50</sup> Karnow, p. 375.

had fallen on deaf ears. Morse continued to speak out against the war throughout the life of the administration but fellow Senators remained largely indifferent to his pleadings regarding Vietnam.

George McGovern of South Dakota was also a long time critic of American involvement in Vietnam. McGovern had spoken out against U.S. policy as early as 1963. Although his misgivings about U.S. policy continued to grow in 1964, McGovern voted for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Years later McGovern lamented that "the vote for the Resolution is the one I most regret during my public career."<sup>51</sup> McGovern, like many other Democrats, rationalized the yes vote by claiming that it was motivated out of trust in Johnson and a fear of Barry Goldwater. McGovern's trust in Johnson, however, quickly deteriorated, solidifying his opposition. In early 1965 McGovern met Johnson in the Oval Office. The former professor of history had brought a memorandum detailing his belief that the United States was pursuing a course that was wrong militarily, politically, economically and morally. McGovern attempted to show the memo to Johnson but the President refused to consider it, saying, "Don't give me another goddam history lesson. I've got a drawerful of memos from Mansfield. I don't need a lecture on where we went wrong. I've got to deal with where we are now."<sup>52</sup> McGovern was never invited back to the Johnson White House. Unable to confront Johnson directly, McGovern continued to speak out against the war and tried to convince other Senators such as Robert Kennedy to oppose the war. McGovern's belief that the war was terribly misguided had been confirmed in late 1965 when he took his first trip to Vietnam. In 1968 he actively supported Kennedy's bid to prevent Johnson from winning reelection to the Presidency.

Frank Church shared McGovern's regret over voting for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Church, much like McGovern and Fulbright, feared the possible election of Barry Goldwater. Goldwater's aggressive foreign policy pronouncements frightened the Idaho Democrat. Church had expressed his misgivings about U.S. policy in Vietnam in a Senate exchange with Fulbright on June 23, 1964, but he cast his doubts aside in order to support President Johnson. Church, like McGovern and Fulbright, believed that Johnson would return to the Senate for approval of more aggressive actions in Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> Church soon discovered that the administration had no such intentions. Following the White House's decision to launch air strikes

---

<sup>51</sup> George McGovern, *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern* (New York, 1977), p. 103.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>53</sup> Ashby and Gramer, p. 184.

against North Vietnam in February 1965, Church gave a major speech in the Senate calling for negotiations, saying that without them "the next step will be to send American land forces into battle, thus converting the struggle into an American war on the Asian mainland."<sup>54</sup> The administration greeted the Idaho Democrat's suggestions with a deafening silence. Church, like Fulbright, was initially encouraged by Johnson's John Hopkins address. The President had invited Church and McGovern to the White House the day before he delivered it in order to dissuade the two Senators from discussing their opposition to the war in the Senate the next day. Johnson's ploy worked, the two men were sufficiently impressed by the President's pledge to negotiate that they postponed their own speeches. Church quickly became disheartened when he discovered that the White House offer to negotiate included so many conditions as to make it unworkable.<sup>55</sup> Church began to speak out once again. On a flight to San Francisco with Johnson aboard Air Force One Johnson once again gave Church an earful over his dissent. Although stung by the President's ferocious displeasure, Church continued to criticize White House policy. The Idaho Democrat was afraid, however, that if he broke completely with the White House he would become marginalized like Morse and Gruening.<sup>56</sup> As a result, Church never wavered in his support for Johnson's domestic programs and continued to try to court favour with the White House. Johnson's attitude towards the Senator, however, began to become one of contempt. For his part, Church never lost his belief that Johnson had betrayed the American people by Americanizing the war in Vietnam after styling himself as the peace candidate during his 1964 campaign for the Presidency.<sup>57</sup>

Other Senators also began to feel disillusioned with American policy. Eugene McCarthy had, by 1968, become the peace activists' standard bearer in the Democratic Party. McCarthy had not spoken out against the war until January 1966, but he became perhaps the most eloquent critic of the administration's policy in the years following. His stance was similar to many of George Aiken's colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Stuart Symington and Clifford Case both supported the Johnson

---

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

administration until 1967 when the two men called for an end to the conflict.<sup>58</sup> Republican Frank Carlson of Kansas was skeptical towards events in Vietnam from the beginning but he remained largely silent until the TET offensive in 1968 when he asked, during a Senate debate, whether the U.S. had not "reached a saturation point" at which "we have lost the support of the civilian population."<sup>59</sup> Other members of the committee joined Aiken as Senate dissenters. These included Democrats Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania and Albert Gore of Tennessee. Pell was a firm but not particularly vocal dissenter on the war while Clark and Gore were consistent critics who made their opinions known a little more publicly. Other critics of the war who made their views known much more forcefully overshadowed these men, but they could nevertheless be regarded as doves. Republican John Williams of Delaware supported the White House policies on Vietnam although he voiced criticism of what he regarded as the administration's tendency to use the committee as little more than a rubber stamp for its decisions.

Williams, however, could be counted on by the White House for his support. The remaining members of the committee, Thomas Dodd of Connecticut, Bourke Hickenlooper of Iowa, Frank Lausche of Ohio, Russell Long of Louisiana, Karl Mundt of South Dakota and John Sparkman of Alabama, were, for the most part, consistently hawkish on Vietnam. Sparkman joined with Aiken and five of his colleagues in drafting a memo demonstrating their concern for administration policy in Vietnam at the end of July 1965 but most of the time he remained a strong supporter of Johnson's actions, often standing up for the White House during committee hearings.<sup>60</sup> Hickenlooper served as Chairman of the Republican Policy Committee during the years Lyndon Johnson was in the White House. The committee was a strong supporter of Johnson's Vietnam policies. Hickenlooper personally backed an aggressive policy of American commitment in Vietnam. The unanimity that Hickenlooper strove to achieve in the Republican Policy Committee was not there on the Foreign Relations Committee, a situation Hickenlooper felt was extremely distressing and detrimental to the country. The Senator felt that divisiveness such as that

---

<sup>58</sup> Aiken later referred to his relationship with Case as "very friendly", describing him as a fellow liberal Republican. Morrissey and Sanford, p. 165.

<sup>59</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein ed., *Political Profiles: The Johnson Years* (New York, 1976), p. 91.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson Library, John Sparkman Oral History, October 5, 1968, p. 22. Aiken described his relationship with Sparkman as very friendly, saying that the two men worked well together. Morrissey and Sanford, p. 164.

displayed by the Senate committee was very harmful to American foreign policy.<sup>61</sup> Russell Long served on the committee until the spring of 1966 when he gave up his seat to Gale McGee of Wyoming. As McGee later recalled, Long was dissatisfied with the other members of the committee and frustrated by the fact that his views were so divergent from those of Chairman Fulbright. Long and McGee held essentially the same views on Vietnam and the two men served as the leading defenders of Johnson's policies in the Senate.<sup>62</sup>

The Foreign Relations Committee was reflective of the Senate as a whole. There were groups of Senators who held views similar to those of Fulbright and Church while there were also those whose views echoed those held by Hickenlooper and McGee. In general the dissent came from the Democratic Party, men such as Aiken and Javits were a distinct minority in the Republican Party. The committee also reflected the Senate in another manner, the dissent became more widespread and hostile as the war continued to expand. In this respect, the Senate was similar to the country in general. As the war went on with no end in sight, the American people became more and more dissatisfied with administration policy. In 1965, however, men with views such as those held by George Aiken remained very much in the minority.

In the first few months of 1965, the Johnson administration gradually increased the level of American support in South Vietnam. For the first time, American forces were directed to seek out and engage the enemy instead of simply responding to Vietcong attacks. This crucial change in American policy was kept from the American people. As the air war against North Vietnam expanded, the need for American troops increased in order to protect U.S. air force bases. As more troops were sent to South Vietnam, it became easier for American commanders in South Vietnam to convince the White House of the need to increase the level of American ground troops. As the administration gave approval to General William Westmoreland's requests for more U.S. troops it also shifted the emphasis in the war from the air battle against North Vietnam to the ground war in South Vietnam. As a result, the administration had tacitly

<sup>61</sup> Johnson Library, Bourke Hickenlooper Oral History, September 19, 1968, p. 8. Aiken described Hickenlooper as being more militant on the war, a Goldwater type. Interview with George Aiken, October 19, 1978, Aiken Papers, Crate 61, Box 6, Folder 29A.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson Library, Gale McGee Oral History, Interview I, October 2, 1969, p. 37.

committed itself to expanding its forces, as the situation required.<sup>63</sup> Although the White House was able to conceal the true nature of the new troop commitments from the public and Congress, the obvious increase of the bombing campaign led to increased criticism of the administration. In response, the White House tried to neutralize its critics with several peace initiatives, including Johnson's greatly publicized Johns Hopkins address and a five day bombing pause in early May. Although the peace moves did not lead to any concrete negotiations, the White House was successful in temporarily quieting its critics.<sup>64</sup> The White House next turned its attention to solidifying congressional support for its policies in Southeast Asia.

In response to growing Congressional sniping over Vietnam, Johnson sent to the Hill a request for \$700 million for additional operations in Southeast Asia and the Dominican Republic. The request included a statement, which read, "This is not a routine appropriation. For each Member of Congress who supports this request is also voting to persist in our effort to halt communist aggression in South Vietnam. Each is saying that the Congress and the President stand united before the world in joint determination that the independence of South Vietnam shall be preserved and communist attack will not succeed...The additional funds that I am requesting are needed to continue to provide our forces with the best and most modern supplies and equipment...To deny and delay this means to deny and delay the fullest support of the American people and the American Congress to those brave men who are risking their lives for freedom in Vietnam".<sup>65</sup> Johnson was planting the flag in Vietnam and appealing to the patriotism of the men and women in Congress, knowing full well that a vote against the measure could easily be interpreted as a vote against America's fighting men, a prospect that most members of Congress would not dare confront.

Johnson's strategy was successful. The House approved the measure by a vote of 408 to 7 on May 6; the Senate followed the next day, approving it 88 to 3.<sup>66</sup> George Aiken was one of those who voted for the measure, albeit with reservations. Aiken had attended a May 4 meeting with Johnson at the White House along with a large congressional delegation.<sup>67</sup> At the meeting, the President outlined his reasons for

---

<sup>63</sup> Herring, p. 132.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Kahin, p. 322.

<sup>66</sup> William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part III: January - July 1965* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1989), pp. 245, 248.

<sup>67</sup> Aiken also attended a smaller bipartisan meeting on May 2 that included only 14 members of Congress. Aiken's position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meant that he was invited to many briefings at the White House. In the first half of 1965 he attended six such

asking the Congress for this additional appropriation. Johnson characterized the goal of the Communists in South Vietnam as one of not only destroying the government in Saigon but also of destroying the credibility of U.S. commitments throughout the world. The United States, according to Johnson, had to resist Communist aggression in Southeast Asia to prove its ability to defend America's ideals.<sup>68</sup> Following the meeting Aiken told reporters that the fund request was nothing more than presidential propaganda. Making his displeasure keenly evident, Aiken said that Johnson "does not need the funds now and he has all the authority he needs to do what he is doing. He is trying desperately to show that the Congress is backing him." Aiken added that he would probably vote for the measure but that "Congressional approval will mean that we are backing our President, but it does not mean that we endorse all the President's decisions."<sup>69</sup> The following day, during Senate debate on the measure, Aiken once again made his disapproval known.

Aiken made it clear from the outset that he had grave reservations about voting for the appropriations request. The Senator doubted that the measure was necessary but declared his intention to vote for it. Aiken said, in part,

Mr. President, I wish to make it plain that my vote is not intended as an endorsement of the costly mistakes of the past, nor as authority to wage war in the future unless such war has been declared by Congress. I realize quite clearly the position that the President has found himself. I have wanted Lyndon Johnson to be a good President. I have wanted him to be a great President. I have wished with all my heart that I could help him with his problems.

But I cannot let the impression go out from this Chamber that in voting for this appropriation I am giving blanket approval to waging undeclared war anywhere or delegating the right to express my thoughts to anyone.<sup>70</sup>

Aiken stressed again his opposition to the bombing of North Vietnam, expressing his doubt that reports of men and supplies into South Vietnam were accurate. Aiken called on the President to negotiate an end to the conflict, expressing his support for any and all attempts to do so.

---

meetings, on January 21, April 12, May 2, May 4, May 27 and July 28. *Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969)*. Johnson Library, Reel 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

<sup>69</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, May 5, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 15.

<sup>70</sup> *Congressional Record - Senate*, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 9499.



Although the appropriations request upset Aiken, the Senator felt he had no choice but to vote for the measure. Aiken expressed his reasons for this action in a 1967 letter, writing that "over two years ago I advised Secretary McNamara in the presence of the President and Secretary Rusk that I did not believe extending the war to North Vietnam would result in an early ending of the war or stop the infiltration of men and material to the Vietcong in the South. However, the President did decide to expand the war to the bombing of North Vietnam. Once he had made this decision, contrary to my own beliefs, I would not turn on my own country. Consequently, I have voted for all appropriations requested by the President for the support of our military forces."<sup>71</sup> Once forces were in the field, Aiken felt he had to vote to support them. His dissent, therefore, never carried the full weight that it could have. Aiken was not alone, only three Senators, Wayne Morse, Gaylord Nelson and Ernest Gruening, voted against the measure. Lyndon Johnson's ploy of couching the appropriation request in terms that made it seem as a vote for or against troops in the heat of battle had worked to stifle the opposition of Congressional critics, Aiken among them. Aiken made it clear he thought the request was merely a public relations game on the part of the President but in the end, with reservations, he voted to grant Johnson's request.<sup>72</sup>

On May 19, Aiken wrote a letter to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, which revealed his attitude towards the administration and its Vietnam policy. He wrote requesting a detailed chronology of events which had led to the present U.S. commitments in Vietnam, including dates and names of American officials. Aiken said it would be a useful case history in preventing what he described as a situation when "all of a sudden we find ourselves committed to all out involvement in a foreign war."<sup>73</sup> Aiken ended the letter by writing that "if we are to retain our present form of representative government and our Constitution which permits that only by vote of Members of Congress can war be declared, it is essential that we not again permit our involvement without prior full Congressional debate and approval", concluding acidly, "if the time has come when the Congress should no longer be consulted beforehand, should not the Constitution be amended accordingly. In this event, I would appreciate receiving your proposed amendment to the

---

<sup>71</sup> Aiken to Honorable George J. Kingston, Jr., 1 April, 1967, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 4, Folder 31.

<sup>72</sup> Aiken put aside his reservations enough to attend the signing ceremony for the Vietnam - Dominican Republic Appropriations request, along with other notable Senate dissenters Frank Church, Wayne Morse and Joseph Clark, on May 7 at the White House. Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969), Johnson Library, Reel 4, May 7, 1965.

<sup>73</sup> Aiken to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, May 19, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 4.

Constitution.”<sup>74</sup> The Department of State ignored Aiken’s sarcasm by sending the Senator a memo with a dry recitation of the events leading to the American commitment, with special emphasis on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the May 4 appropriation request. The memo included the humourless observation that “the Department does not believe that there is a need for a constitutional amendment arising out of the present situation in Vietnam.”<sup>75</sup> Although Aiken’s letter was obviously written tongue in cheek, his position was revealed clearly to the State Department.

Lyndon Johnson used the approval of his appropriation request to full effect. The day he signed the measure Johnson said “let the meaning of this action be clear. To the brave people of South Vietnam, who are fighting and who are dying for the right to choose their own way of life, this resolution says: ‘America keeps her promises. And we will back up those promises with all the resources that we need.’ To our own boys who are fighting and dying beside the people of South Vietnam, this resolution says to them: ‘We are going to give you the tools to finish the job’.”<sup>76</sup> Although Johnson had blunted the growing congressional criticism, he could not as easily blunt the determination of North Vietnam.

Although the United States had continued to contribute more in U.S. aid and military pressure for the defense of South Vietnam, the situation in Southeast Asia deteriorated drastically. In May and June the Vietcong defeated the South Vietnamese in a series of battles. The South Vietnamese Army was in danger of being completely destroyed. Ambassador Taylor’s fear that the Saigon would hand over more and more responsibility for the conduct of the war to Washington was bearing fruit. Desertion ran as high as fifty percent in some South Vietnamese units and the high command was more interested in waging battles for government control than in conducting an effective campaign against the Vietcong. As far as General Westmoreland was concerned, the situation had become desperate. With that in mind he cabled Washington and wrote that a major introduction of additional American ground forces was needed to prevent the fall of South Vietnam. Westmoreland called for the immediate deployment of thirty-five battle ready battalions, with nine more battalions on alert for later need.<sup>77</sup> Westmoreland advocated an

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Department of State to Senator George Aiken, May 29, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 4.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Johnson, p. 142.

<sup>77</sup> Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), p. 26.

abandonment of the enclave strategy. He was convinced, as he wrote, that "U.S. troops with their energy, mobility, and firepower can successfully take the fight to the Vietcong. The basic purpose of the additional deployments....is to give us a substantial and hard hitting offensive capability on the ground."<sup>78</sup> Westmoreland ended the cable by stating that "studies must continue and plans be developed to deploy even greater forces, if and when required."<sup>79</sup> Robert McNamara later described the dispatch as the most disturbing of the thousands he received relating to Vietnam. The cable set off an intense and extended White House debate on Vietnam.

Along with his request for additional U.S. troops, Westmoreland stressed the need to change the combat mission of American forces. The General, with the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was anxious to abandon the enclave strategy, a mission that called for the defense of certain regions of South Vietnam, a purely defensive action. The enclave strategy was anathema to most military men; Westmoreland described it as "too negative".<sup>80</sup> The introduction of more troops would allow Westmoreland to actively seek out and destroy enemy forces, an offensive action more suited to the temperament of the military. While the meetings on possible troop expansions were occurring, Johnson gave Westmoreland the authority to introduce U.S. forces into any area of South Vietnam he deemed vital, an abandonment of the enclave strategy. Westmoreland also made it plainly clear that he would need more troops over and above his June 7 request. Under his plan, an additional 100,000 men would be needed in 1966 with more to follow in 1967.<sup>81</sup> By granting Westmoreland's request to expand the combat role of American forces, Johnson was implicitly choosing to accede to the military's troop requests.

The same day that Westmoreland's cable reached McNamara's desk, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met to discuss Johnson's request for roughly \$89 million in foreign aid for Vietnam. During this executive session of the committee, George Aiken once again revealed his distaste for administration maneuvering on Vietnam. He commented that he was "afraid this is just another effort for the administration who got us in a mess over there to play it up before the whole world that the United States

---

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> McNamara, p. 188.

<sup>80</sup> Gravel ed., p. 481.

<sup>81</sup> Schandler, pp. 27-28.

Senate is solidly behind anything the President wants to do", saying further that "this committee didn't get the United States in the mess it is in over there and I think the responsibility should be left where it belongs."<sup>82</sup> Aiken suggested that the \$89 million be given directly to the President and not the foreign aid agency. Aiken viewed this as a means of forcing Johnson to, as he put it, use the money "for either bashing them or buying them."<sup>83</sup> Aiken's disdain for the administration's two pronged strategy was clearly displayed. According to Aiken, increasing military pressure was not a viable solution nor was the strategy to 'bury' the North Vietnamese off, a reference to Johnson's much-ballyhooed Johns Hopkins' speech proposing a Southeast Asia Development program. Aiken's proposal to give the funds directly to the President was put to a committee vote where it lost, 13 votes to 4.

Aiken repeated some of these remarks in the Senate itself later the same day. Aiken was unhappy with the administration's strategy of making the \$89 million request under the auspices of the Foreign Aid Bill. The Vermont Senator once again put forth his idea that the money be given directly to Johnson, to be spent directly by the President. Aiken's proposal was linked to his belief that the President should be given wider latitude to use the money for war or peace. He had suggested the same thing a few weeks earlier when Johnson had requested a restoration of \$115 million to the Foreign Aid Bill. As Aiken said it "would have given him some bargaining power if negotiation could be arranged. My suggestion was rejected by the administration, which wanted the money for war, and defeated in committee. No mention was made of peace."<sup>84</sup> Aiken went on to say that the administration was asking for money that it didn't really need at that time. In blunt terms Aiken described the motives of the White House, saying, "what it now desires is to propagandize the world into believing that the Congress is unanimously behind any move, which the administration chooses to make."<sup>85</sup> Aiken made it clear that he would vote against the request.

Four days later, Maxwell Taylor, American Ambassador to South Vietnam, testified before a joint executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees. Taylor told the

---

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 301.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 12727.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

committee that current plans called for sending additional 18, 000 U.S. troops to Vietnam, increasing the total of U.S. forces to roughly 70, 000. The Ambassador deemed the following few months a critical time in the war but he stressed the administration line that the forces stationed in South Vietnam, combined with those of the South Vietnamese army, could withstand the aggression of the Vietcong.<sup>86</sup> The administration was claiming, forcefully, that the United States was not on the brink of assuming the burden of the fighting. Aiken, in comments to reporters after the Ambassador's testimony, described Taylor's appearance before the committee as a frank assessment of the conditions in South Vietnam, but stressed that "he told us nothing to create any great amount of optimism."<sup>87</sup> In response to Taylor's claim that a formal declaration of war would not be helpful at this time, Aiken rather tartly observed that "he still contends that this is Vietnam's war, and he is probably technically correct."<sup>88</sup> Aiken's comment reveals that he did not subscribe to the theory that the United States was not taking over the war. Aiken had earlier revealed his distaste for the breadth of the American military commitment by stating that "it is difficult for me to understand what our armed forces...are thinking when they send 200 planes to blow up a bridge. Is it braggadocio?"<sup>89</sup> Aiken was becoming less and less comfortable with the administration's handling of events in South Vietnam.

The day after Westmoreland's cable arrived in Washington, June 8, Johnson assembled his principal advisers in meeting to consider the General's request. In this initial meeting, the consensus was that Westmoreland's request for a 175,000 troop level was too high. Ambassador Taylor, in Washington for a week, argued that only 8000 troops should be added to the 82,000 already in South Vietnam. His main concern centered on his belief that the South Vietnamese would cede more and more military responsibility to the United States as additional U.S. forces were introduced.<sup>90</sup> McNamara, Rusk and

---

<sup>86</sup> Gibbons, p. 303.

<sup>87</sup> *The New York Times* (June 12, 1965), sect. 1, p. 2, Col. 6.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* Taylor told Aiken during the hearing that he saw no reason for the United States to declare war. Aiken also made it clear in his questioning of Taylor that he assumed that it was only a matter of time before the United States assumed command of the military situation in South Vietnam. Taylor denied that the administration had any plans to initiate such a change in strategy. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), 1965, vol. XVII (Washington, D.C., Govt. Print. Off., 1990), p. 690-691.

<sup>89</sup> *The New York Times* (June 6, 1965), section 4, p. 3, col. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Gibbons, p. 279.

McGeorge Bundy were in favour of a 100,000 troop ceiling. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle Wheeler, was uncomfortable with the idea of a major land war involving 175,000 U.S. troops in Southeast Asia but his main concern rested with fulfilling the needs of the commander in the field.<sup>91</sup> Under Secretary of State George Ball put forth the firmest opposition, arguing that a commitment of more troops, whether it be 8000 or 18,000 would quickly lead to greater escalation, quickly totaling 300,000 to 400,000 men.<sup>92</sup> The others at the meeting dismissed Ball's prescient warning as farfetched and unlikely.

Johnson called Senate Majority Leader Mansfield the same day to probe his reading of whether or not Congress would be amenable to passing a new resolution, based on Westmoreland's request, regarding American commitments in Southeast Asia. The following day Mansfield sent Johnson a memorandum detailing his opposition to seeking a new resolution. He stressed that the Senate had supported Johnson's Vietnam policies in the past, albeit with "grave doubts and much trepidation on the part of many Senators", but he felt that another vote would almost certainly be accompanied by widespread criticism and demands for detailed inquiries.<sup>93</sup> In the same memo Mansfield questioned the wisdom of granting Westmoreland his troop demands. The Majority leader envisioned an escalation, which could lead to all out war with China. He warned that "a course once set in motion, as you know, often develops its own momentum and rationale whatever the initial intentions."<sup>94</sup> The Senate Minority Leader, Everett Dirksen, also opposed a debate on a new resolution, linking his position to the belief that a divisive argument would harm the morale of the U.S. forces already in Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> These strong negative reactions of the two leaders of the Senate stayed Johnson's hand; they also led the President to reconsider George Ball's proposals for seeking a negotiated settlement to the crisis in Vietnam.

Other Senators expressed themselves on the idea that President Johnson seek congressional approval for once again expanding the military role of the United States in Vietnam. Jacob Javits gave a lengthy speech in the Senate stressing his belief that without a new resolution, commitment of the U.S. to a land

---

<sup>91</sup> Gibbons pp. 279-280 and VanDeMark, p. 154.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281-282.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986), p. 350.

<sup>95</sup> Gibbons, p. 282.

war in Asia would unleash a veritable firestorm of criticism and division in the country. George Aiken, in response to Javits' speech, asked if the Congress should declare war on North Vietnam. Aiken's remarks make it plain that he was virulently opposed to any such plan. He said that "Congress would do so if it were asked to do so by the President. If that were to happen, the President would be relieved of responsibility. It would take him off the hook. It would be exactly what he wants. I am sure of that and I cannot say I blame him."<sup>96</sup> Aiken, privy to the administration's study of Westmoreland's request because of his close relationship with Mansfield, was signaling his intense opposition to full scale war in Vietnam. The need to keep pressure on Johnson was stressed by Aiken; the President had to be made to carefully consider any decision to once again escalate hostilities.

This criticism by members of Congress, especially that offered by Mansfield, a man Johnson had great respect for, served to steel Johnson's resolve not to accede to Westmoreland's request for 175,000 troops. At a June 10 meeting at the White House, Johnson asked his advisers many of the same questions raised by Mansfield in his memo. His civilian advisers were, at this point, all but unified in their belief that a 100,000 troop ceiling was the best solution to the crisis. The rationale was based on the belief that with this troop level the U.S. could prevent a communist victory in South Vietnam with the expectation that this would push Hanoi to the negotiating table. Johnson seemed to give more credence and attention to George Ball because as the President said, "we must delay and deter the North Vietnamese and Vietcong as much as we can, and as simply as we can, without going all out. When we grant General Westmoreland's request, it means that we get in deeper and it is harder to get out."<sup>97</sup>

Over the next six weeks, Johnson held a series of White House meetings designed to reach a decision on what direction the administration should follow in Vietnam. By the end of June, Johnson had still not reached a decision. On July 2 Johnson phoned Dwight Eisenhower. The advice that the former President offered was simple and direct. He said that "when you once appeal to force in an international situation involving military help for a nation, you have to go all out! This is a war, and as long as they (the enemy)

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decision making on Vietnam, 1954 to 1965* (New York, 1989), p. 202 and Kahin, p. 350.

are putting men down there, my advice is to do what you have to do!"<sup>98</sup> Johnson asked Eisenhower if the Vietcong could in fact be defeated to which he could not give a definitive answer. Eisenhower had made it plain, however, that abandoning South Vietnam, in his opinion, could not be considered. Johnson edged closer to escalation.

For further aid, Johnson turned to a distinguished group of elder statesman. Included among them were Dean Acheson, former Secretary of State, Omar Bradley, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Robert Lovett, former Secretary of Defense, as well as Roswell Gilpatric, John McCloy and others. The men were called to Washington for consultations with various members of the administration. The sessions culminated in a meeting with the President on July 8. Johnson began the meeting with an extended lament over the difficulties he faced in South Vietnam. As Acheson later expressed in a letter to Harry Truman, he became exasperated with Johnson and finally told him, rather heatedly, that he had no choice but to continue on the course he had set in Vietnam. The others agreed wholeheartedly with Acheson's assessment. William Bundy later wrote that Johnson "probably expected that most of the panel would be generally in favour of a firm policy. What he found was that almost all were solidly of this view, and this must have had a distinct impact on his personal and private deliberations."<sup>99</sup> Reflecting back on this period in 1969, Bundy was convinced that Johnson had made up his mind by this point that he would give Westmoreland the troops he had requested.<sup>100</sup>

Johnson held two press conferences in the week following his meeting with the Wise Men. Although

---

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made*; Acheson, Bohlen, Harriman, Kennan, Lovett, McCloy (New York, 1986), p. 653.

<sup>100</sup> Johnson Library, William Bundy Oral History, Interview II, May 29, 1969, p. 39. This point has raised a great deal of controversy among historians and contemporary administration officials. William Bundy himself later came to the conclusion that Johnson did not, in fact, commit himself to an increased troop deployment before July 24, 1965, during the midst of a highly publicized and studied series of extensive meetings on Vietnam. Clark Clifford believes that he had all but decided to pursue an escalation before the meetings began (Clark Clifford, *Counsel To The President* [New York, 1991], p. 411) while George Ball writes of Johnson's "agonizing reluctance to go forward", overcome only at these meetings (Ball, p. 399). Robert McNamara shares Ball's opinion that Johnson only came to this decision at that time (McNamara with VanDeMark, p. 204). Johnson himself stressed that he was aware of the magnitude of the decision and he felt it imperative to gather his advisers together before making a final determination (Johnson, p. 146).

Historians have shared this confusion about Johnson's deliberative process. Stanley Karnow describes the late July meetings as "largely contrived", contending that Johnson had already made his decision (Karnow, p. 424). Larry Berman shares this opinion, he writes that the process was used to legitimize the decision (Berman, p. 152). John Burke and Fred Greenstein as well as Brian VanDeMark, while not going as far as Karnow and Berman, believe that Johnson, although he had not made a final determination, was leaning very strongly towards a new troop commitment (Burke and Greenstein, p. 215 and VanDeMark, p. 177). The meetings were, therefore, used to reinforce his beliefs. Johnson never seriously considered not approving Westmoreland's troop requests in late July. George Kahin is convinced that Johnson did not make up his mind until the July meetings and George Herring, while recognizing that McNamara's arguments were pushing the President towards escalation, also believes that Johnson made the final decision only at the July meetings (Kahin, p. 527 and Herring, pp. 158-59).



Johnson did not make a formal speech to the nation on the events in Vietnam during this period, he did reveal to the press that decisions on further troop commitments seemed imminent. On July 9 he stated, in response to a prearranged question about Vietnam, that "our manpower needs there are increasing, and will continue to do so. We have some 60,000 - odd people there now, and they are landing each day. There are some 75,000 that will be there very shortly. There will be others that will be required. Whatever is required I am sure will be supplied."<sup>101</sup> On July 13, the President was more blunt. In his opening statement at that day's press conference he stated that Westmoreland had been given wide latitude to use American forces as he saw fit in response to what Johnson described as new aggression caused by heavy infiltration of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese forces. He said further that "it is possible that new and serious decisions will be necessary in the near future" and in response to a question regarding the introduction of more troops he said that North Vietnamese "forces that are pursuing aggression have greatly increased in number. It will be necessary to resist that aggression and, therefore, to have substantially larger increments of troops which we have been supplying from time to time."<sup>102</sup> These statements make it clear that Johnson had indeed decided to greatly increase U.S. troop levels in South Vietnam, the only question which remained to be decided was the number of men that would be sent to South Vietnam.

External pressures were also forcing Johnson's hand. The military situation in South Vietnam had steadily worsened since South Vietnamese forces had suffered grave defeats in mid June. The perception that events were worsening in South Vietnam led to an even louder cacophony of conservative Republican voices on the conduct of the war. Congressman Melvin Laird of Wisconsin was perhaps the most strident in his criticism of the administration. He released a statement, which stated, in part, that "we may be dangerously close to ending any Republican support of our present Vietnam policy. Present policy is aimed not at victory over the Communist insurgency nor at driving the Communists out of South Vietnam, but at some sort of negotiated settlement which would include Communist elements in a coalition government."<sup>103</sup> Laird also joined with House Leader Gerald Ford to demand that defense

---

<sup>101</sup> Johnson ed., p. 334 and Gibbons, p. 367.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 339, 343.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in "The Road Past North C Pier", *Newsweek* (June 28, 1965), p. 20.

spending be increased by between one and two billion dollars and that 200,000 reserves be mobilized. Senator Goldwater predicted that any coalition government installed in Saigon by negotiation would be taken over by Communists very quickly. Ford stressed that "the United States cannot, without violating its word, agree to a settlement which involves a coalition government with Communists...The administration must not sacrifice the freedom and independence of South Vietnam."<sup>104</sup> The leaders of the Republican Party were pressuring Johnson to not only stand fast in South Vietnam but to increase the U.S. presence there to insure victory.

These threats from the Republican leadership, particularly that offered by Laird, drew a sharp rebuke from Mike Mansfield and George Aiken. The two Senators gave speeches in the Senate that voiced the same concerns. On June 30 Mansfield described Republican criticism of Johnson as a threat designed to impose their views on American foreign policy. As Mansfield saw it, the Republicans were threatening to withdraw their support unless the White House increased the level of American involvement, a move which the Majority Leader believed could lead to a much higher number of casualties of U.S. army personnel.<sup>105</sup> Of course, what bothered Mansfield the most was not that Republicans were expressing opinions on U.S. foreign policy but that these views were so divergent from those he held.

Aiken followed Mansfield's speech with brief but biting comments of his own. Aiken said that the recent statements by leaders of his own party could be interpreted as an attempt to push Johnson into broadening and intensifying the war in Vietnam. He made it clear that he hoped that the hostilities in Southeast Asia would not become a political issue to be exploited by Republicans to criticize a Democratic President. Aiken said that other issues could be used in future political campaigns, adding that Republicans who sought to discredit Johnson because he had not, as the Vermonter said, "precipitated us into a great war", were playing a dangerous game, one that would lead to an ever worsening situation in Vietnam, an option Aiken found abhorrent.<sup>106</sup> Aiken called on the President to show courage in not responding to needling from members of Congress who were calling for escalation. He feared that comments such as those made by Laird could lead to the Republican Party being labeled a war party.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 306.

<sup>105</sup> *The New York Times* (June 1, 1965), sect. 1, p. 3, col. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 15320.

Aiken ended his speech by saying that "the President has difficult decisions to make. He could easily make the wrong one, one that could cause the world's population to suffer and regret for generations to come. He has taken some action in the war in Southeast Asia of which I do not approve. Nevertheless, I do not intend to urge him to make greater mistakes."<sup>107</sup> Aiken's final, sharp rejoinder illustrated his belief that Johnson's Vietnam policy had been a failure and he did not want his party to compound that failure by urging ever greater degrees of escalation. Unfortunately, Lyndon Johnson was in the process of making that very decision.

Johnson called a final series of meetings to determine the course of American action in Vietnam at the end of July. After days of discussion, Johnson, in a meeting of the National Security Council on July 27, outlined the five options he believed were available to him. The first four were presented in negative terms. The first involved a massive bombing campaign of unprecedented scale; the second was presented as the pack up and go home option, an unacceptable alternative to Johnson. The third option called for continuing with the present program, which Johnson derided by saying that the United States would 'continue to lose territory and casualties', ending his summary of this option with a direct challenge to his advisers, saying "you wouldn't want your boy out there and crying for help and not get it."<sup>108</sup> The fourth option called for going to the Congress and asking for a substantial amount of money, calling up the reserves, increasing the draft and declaring a state of emergency by going on war footing. The option that Johnson stressed in the most positive terms was the fifth one he presented. This involved giving the commanders in the field the troop increases they desired without congressional approval for new funds. The manpower needs would be funded through other means. Johnson told everyone assembled that the rationale for going this route revolved around making sure that the United States did not unnecessarily provoke the Russians and Chinese. Johnson made it clear that this was the option he was choosing, he was not consulting his aides any longer, and he was telling them what he had decided to do.<sup>109</sup>

Although Johnson stressed that he was not seeking congressional approval for new funds because of a desire not to provoke the Russians and Chinese, the real reasons involved domestic political affairs.

---

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Burke and Greenstein, p. 227.

<sup>109</sup> VanDeMark, p. 208 and Burke and Greenstein, pp. 227-228 and Gibbons, p. 425.

Johnson was afraid that asking for large war appropriations would lead some in Congress to scale back Great Society funding. Johnson's dream was that of a Great Society and in the summer of 1965 he seemed to be on the verge of realizing it. Johnson, reflecting back on this period, years later, said that he "was determined to keep the war from shattering that dream which meant I simply had no choice but to keep my foreign policy in the wings...I knew that the day it exploded into a major debate on the war, that day would be the beginning of the end of the Great Society."<sup>110</sup> Ironically, one of the men most opposed to escalation in Vietnam, Mike Mansfield, had contributed to Johnson's vision of the Great Society crumbling under the weight of congressional dissent<sup>111</sup>. Mansfield's vigorous opposition to Johnson's early June idea of seeking a new congressional resolution for Vietnam had no doubt solidified the President's reluctance to present the issue to Congress for debate. Mansfield himself was informed of Johnson's decision to escalate the war without congressional approval the morning of July 27 at a presidential meeting of the Democratic Congressional Leadership. The Majority Leader immediately set about trying to change the President's mind with one last ditch effort.

At the morning legislative meeting with Johnson at the White House, Mansfield had told Johnson, regarding Vietnam, that "we owe this government nothing, no pledge of any kind. We are going deeper into war. Escalation begets escalation. The best hope for salvation is quick stalemate and negotiations."<sup>112</sup> Later that day, Mansfield gathered in his office with Senators Aiken, Fulbright, Russell, Sparkman and Cooper. William Conrad Gibbons points out that these six men were all held in very high esteem by their fellow Senators, their opinions had great weight.<sup>113</sup> If any group of Senators were to capture the President's attention, this would be it. Fulbright was convinced that the group would be able to influence Johnson's decision.<sup>114</sup> None of the so-called Senate radicals on Vietnam were included in the group, men such as Wayne Morse, Ernest Gruening, George McGovern and Frank Church. All of these men had made their displeasure with Johnson's Vietnam policy very evident in public displays of dissension.

---

<sup>110</sup> Kearns, p. 296.

<sup>111</sup> Mansfield wrote a memo to Johnson outlining his belief that the United States would have to send up to a million troops to Vietnam. The Majority Leader envisioned increasing divisiveness in American society as U.S. commitments to Vietnam escalated a situation that Mansfield believed would have an extremely negative effect on Johnson's domestic programs. Olson, p. 157.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Woods, p. 375.

<sup>113</sup> Gibbons, p. 435.

<sup>114</sup> Woods, p. 375.

Inclusion of any of them would have immediately poisoned Johnson's reception of the advice they were to offer the President. The six men drafted a letter, which expressed nineteen points of difference with administration policy.

Mansfield had told the other five men of the discussion he had had with the President that morning. The memorandum began with a passage wherein the six men focused on the reassurance they felt by the President's avowed desire to seek peace through Dean Rusk and Arthur Goldberg, the newly appointed Ambassador to the United Nations.<sup>115</sup> The President had told Mansfield that the troop reinforcements he was authorizing were designed to hold the line militarily while the emphasis would be placed on negotiating an end to the crisis. The six men had chosen to pledge their support on the basis of Johnson's promise to seek peace. As a result they focused not on the fact that Johnson was enlarging the military presence in Vietnam but rather on his claim that military action would take a secondary role to that of attempting to solve the crisis. This was a strategy that George Aiken would follow in the weeks ahead.

The nineteen points focused on seeking multiple avenues wherein peaceful solutions could be found to end the war; the United Nations was stressed as a means through which peace could be achieved. They also pointed out that belligerent actions towards the Soviet Union would only serve to exacerbate tensions between the two countries; as a result the Senators stressed that understanding Russian motives for wanting to help the North Vietnamese was vital. The memo also stressed that public support for the President handling of the situation in Vietnam was not based on any real understanding of the situation and that dissent could explode very easily. The Senators also doubted that the South Vietnamese armed forces were capable fighters, they were derisively compared to their Vietcong counterparts. A key point raised by the memo, one which was largely absent in administration meetings, focused on what the U.S. was attempting to achieve in Vietnam. The Senators wrote that "the main perplexity in the Vietnamese situation is that even if you win, totally, you still do not come out well. What have you achieved? It is by no means a 'vital' area of U.S. concern as it was described by Lodge at a meeting this morning."<sup>116</sup> The

---

<sup>115</sup> Aiken had attended the swearing-in ceremony of Ambassador Goldberg at the White House on July 26. Aiken had also been present that same evening at a White House dinner honouring Sir Norman and Lady Brookes of Australia. *Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969)*, Johnson Library, Reel 4, July 26, 1965.

<sup>116</sup> Gibbons, p. 434. The meeting with Lodge refers to a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Lodge's nomination as Ambassador to South Vietnam.

nineteenth point of the memo dealt with the dissatisfaction that the Senators felt regarding McNamara's role in the handling of the Vietnam crisis. The memo concludes with a starkly negative assessment of the American presence in Vietnam. The Senators wrote:

It should be noted that there was obviously not unanimity among the Members present on all of the points listed. But there was a very substantial agreement on many of them. Moreover, there was full agreement that insofar as Vietnam is concerned we are deeply enmeshed in a place where we ought not to be; that the situation is rapidly going out of control; and that every effort should be made to extricate ourselves.<sup>117</sup>

Although Lyndon Johnson had respect for the views of these men, he had decided on his course of action. These Senate Wise Men had voiced their opinions too late. If they had sent the memorandum weeks before it might have had an effect, by this time Johnson was too far along the road to escalation to turn back. Although there were by this time many voices in the Senate speaking out against escalation, some more than others, there was little or no organization of dissent oriented Senators. Aiken later felt that the lack of organization was a real detriment to those who were attempting to prevent Johnson from expanding the scope of the war in Vietnam.<sup>118</sup> The scattering of the anti-escalation forces made it easy for Johnson to exclude those who disagreed with him on the war in meetings with congressional leaders. On the very day that the six Senators sent their memorandum to Johnson, the President held a bipartisan meeting with members of Congress. He was careful not to include most of the leading Senate doves.

At that evening's meeting, eleven congressional leaders met with Johnson and members of his administration. Johnson outlined the same five options he had presented to the members of his Cabinet earlier. The only voices of dissent came from Senators Mansfield and Hickenlooper. Speaker of the House John McCormack had set the tone for the meeting by saying, "I don't think we have any alternatives. Our military men tell us we need more and we should give it to them. The lesson of Hitler and Mussolini is clear."<sup>119</sup> Mansfield spoke at the end of the meeting, stating forcefully that the "best hope for salvation is quick stalemate and negotiations. We cannot expect our people to support a war for 3-5 years. What we are about is an anti-Communist crusade, on and on."<sup>120</sup> Mansfield's opposition came in the face of

---

<sup>117</sup> Gibbons, p. 435. The entire memorandum is included in Appendix A.

<sup>118</sup> Johnson Library, George Aiken Oral History, Interview I, October 10, 1968.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Burke and Greenstein, p. 228.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Kahin, p. 397.

overwhelming support from nine of the other members of Congress present. Johnson did not even respond to Mansfield's statement.

The next morning Johnson held a bipartisan meeting with thirty-three senior members of Congress, Aiken included. Johnson did not pretend that the gathering was consultative, rather he told them of his decision and his plan to announce it in a press conference the same day. Two hours after the meeting Johnson stood in front of the press and announced that the United States would be increasing its fighting strength in Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000 men, effective immediately. Although Johnson said that additional force requests would be granted, he deliberately declined to tell the press that he had in fact approved the deployment of 175,000 to 200,000 troops. Johnson stressed repeatedly that his main desire was for peace. He pledged that the United States stood ready to negotiate at any time. To that end he revealed that he had instructed Ambassador Goldberg to present a presidential letter to Secretary General U Thant of the United Nations asking that organization for help in finding a peaceful solution to the war in Vietnam. Johnson did not reveal the basic change in administration policy, which was occurring, namely the takeover of the war by American forces.<sup>121</sup>

Johnson had chosen a noon hour press conference in order to give the announcement as little import as possible. Included in the press conference were announcements concerning the nomination of John Chancellor as head of the United States Information Agency and Abe Fortas to the Supreme Court. The inclusion of these nominations was a concerted effort by Johnson to deflect attention from the Vietnam announcements. As well, speculation had been building in the press concerning an expected call up of military reserves as well as a request for new funds. By not making these requests, Johnson was presenting himself as a President who was seeking a moderate course of action. In an effort to protect his beloved Great Society programs, the President had chosen to tell the Congress and the country no more than was absolutely necessary. He was conspiring to take the country into a full scale war without their knowledge.

Johnson's announcement was greeted favourably by the American people and the press. *Newsweek* summed up the mood of the country in this passage: "...the President, in the process, reinforced his image

---

<sup>121</sup> Johnson ed., pp. 348-351.

as a man of moderation, left himself an open hand for the future and at the same time permitted the nation an almost audible sigh of relief."<sup>122</sup> Editorial reaction around the country, emphasizing Johnson's call for peace through negotiations, was generally positive. The *Boston Herald's* editorial stated that "The President clearly is not a warhawk. He is committing us to a holding operation and his objective is to bring the enemy to the peace table with the least possible bloodshed and heartbreak." The editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* read, in part, "The President's position is sound, it is right, and it deserves the solid backing of the American people...One senses that the nation and perhaps the world are beginning to understand him better as a man whose instincts and longings are oriented toward peaceful pursuits, but whose jets and divisions will strike with unhesitating decisiveness and ferocity when they must. The success of Johnson's strategy to paint himself as a moderate on the war was illuminated clearly by the editorial, which appeared in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. It read, "President Johnson's announcement of an American troop build-up in Vietnam had been expected. The significance of his statement on Wednesday, coming after a week's extensive and well publicized policy conference, lies in the limited objectives he proclaimed and his heartening emphasis upon a search for a peaceful solution."<sup>123</sup>

The American people also seemed to approve of the President's handling of the war in Vietnam. A mid August poll asked the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Johnson administration is handling the situation in Vietnam?". Of those questioned, 57% approved, an improvement from the 52% who voiced approval in mid July and the 48% in mid June.<sup>124</sup> Johnson's gambit of presenting his way as a moderate, middle course had, in the short term, worked. The U.S. Congress also reacted quite favourably to Johnson's announcement. Statements made by various members generally emphasized Johnson's call for negotiations to end conflict. Along with the decision to defer calling up reserve units, this engendered a palpable sense of relief among most members of Congress.<sup>125</sup> Mansfield said that the President was "seeking an honourable settlement" while Everett Dirksen reiterated his support for Johnson. Gerald Ford praised Johnson's "firmness against Communist aggression." Republican Senator John Sherman Cooper

<sup>122</sup> "The War No One Wants - Or Can End", *Newsweek* (August 9, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>123</sup> *The New York Times* (August 1, 1965), sect. 4, p. 11, col. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Gibbons, p. 444.

<sup>125</sup> *The New York Times* (July 29, 1965), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 6 and Gibbons, p. 444.



said that Johnson "wants the world to understand that the United States does not intend our troops to take the primary responsibility for enlarging the war."<sup>126</sup> Johnson was supported by Senators from across the political spectrum including Republican Thomas Kuchel, conservative Democrats Gale McGee and Frank Lausche as well as liberals such as William Proxmire and moderate - liberals Frank Moss and Fred Harris. Only Wayne Morse stressed his complete opposition to the decision, declaring that he had "no intention of becoming an accomplice to homicide in Southeast Asia."<sup>127</sup> Johnson's avowal to seek a peaceful settlement to the war had, for the most part, muzzled his Democratic critics in Congress.

George Aiken made a brief statement in the Senate on July 29, 1965. It is evident that Aiken was also relieved by Johnson's apparent decision not to grant Westmoreland the full compliment of troops he had requested. Aiken had certainly been privy, through his relationship with Mansfield, to the dimensions of the request that the General had made in early June. The Vermonter had urged members of Congress, specifically those in the Republican Party, not to push the President towards a decision, which would greatly enlarge the American presence in Vietnam. The seemingly moderate decision taken by Johnson must have been comforting to Aiken, quieting his fears somewhat. Aiken said,

I should like to say, in support of the statement of the majority leader, that in spite of the fact that the President has called for 50,000 more troops in South Vietnam at this time, his statement of yesterday was the most encouraging and the farthest step toward peace, if the rest of the world wants peace, that we have had up to date when he stated that we were willing to sit down at the table, even with Hanoi, to discuss means of settling the Southeast Asia situation. That was a very long step toward going at least halfway, and probably a little more than halfway. As I see it, much now depends upon the United Nations. The United Nations has an opportunity to demonstrate whether it is an effective agency to bring about peace in the world. I am optimistic over the appointment of Arthur Goldberg as our Ambassador to the United Nations. But whether peace or war comes is largely a question, which is up to the Communist countries, particularly Russia, to answer. If Russia declares peace, President Johnson has indicated that we will meet them halfway. There are two countries - The United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - that can restore and maintain peace in the world if they so desire. I would warn, however, that we cannot expect peace to come overnight or reassurance of peace to come overnight. It is necessary to save face. There is the matter of national honour, or call it what one will. I do not know how national honour would be served by having several hundred million dead people in the world, or what it would be worth to us afterward; but we cannot expect the nations most seriously involved to back away from their positions overnight. It will have to be an inching operation, possibly. If Russia is unwilling to attempt to settle this matter, she must bear the major part of the responsibility if a greater war should come.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> *The New York Times* (July 29, 1965), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 6 and sect. 1, p. 11, cols. 2-4.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 448.

<sup>128</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 18815.

Aiken devoted only the first few lines of his speech to Johnson's announcement that 50,000 additional U.S. troops would be going to Vietnam. The rest of the speech was devoted to the President's statement's concerning peace initiatives. Aiken emphasized the role that the United Nations had to play in the peace process. Aiken had stressed repeatedly his belief that the United Nations was an important organization that should be supported by the United States. Aiken had been emphasizing that the United States should pay its outstanding dues as a means of demonstrating its commitment to maintaining the viability of the United Nations. Aiken was heartened by Johnson's pledge to employ the UN in peace efforts.

Although Aiken was adamantly opposed to enlarging the role of the United States in Vietnam he continued to believe that the Soviet Union was the main obstacle to peace. Aiken was satisfied that Johnson was doing all that he could to bring about peace in Southeast Asia. Aiken believed that the Russians, not the Chinese or the North Vietnamese, were responsible for making peace. This belief underscored Aiken's opposition to the war in Vietnam. He recognized that the United States had obligations to its allies but his fear of a world war remained a primary concern. Aiken saw nuclear destruction looming if the war in Vietnam escalated too far out of control. The Senator wanted to highlight what he viewed as the positive attributes of Johnson's announcement, therefore he did not dwell on the part that he found most offensive, namely the introduction of more and more American troops. In comments to the press Aiken once again stressed Johnson's commitment to peace. He told a reporter that Johnson's statement "won't satisfy those who have been advocating a great expansion of the war or those who say 'get out, lock, stock and barrel.'" Under the circumstances, the President's middle course will find general acceptance throughout the country and will probably be more conducive to ultimate peace than a more extreme statement would have been. It's quite apparent he wants to give the United Nations full opportunity to demonstrate that it is an effective organization for the promotion of world peace. If the United Nations doesn't act, then I would say he would be reviewing the situation again."<sup>129</sup> Aiken was right, Johnson's middle course had indeed brought him approval from the American people, and Aiken approved as well. To his dismay, however, he and the American people would soon discover that the

---

<sup>129</sup> *The New York Times* (July 29, 1965), sect. 1, p. 11, col. 2. Johnson made a flurry of phone calls in the days following his decision to enlarge the U.S. military presence in Vietnam, many to assuage the fears of members of Congress. Among these calls was one made to Senator Aiken on July 30. *Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969)*, Johnson Library, reel 4, July 30, 1965.

President had put the nation on the path to a massive military commitment in Vietnam.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *AIKEN VISITS SOUTH VIETNAM*

In December of 1965 George Aiken, along with fellow Senators Mike Mansfield, Daniel Inouye, Edmund Muskie and J. Caleb Boggs, got a first hand look at the situation in South Vietnam. The group stopped in South Vietnam in the midst of a worldwide trip to assess the attitudes of U.S. allies towards the conflict in Southeast Asia. The trip served to cement Aiken's belief that the United States had committed a grave error by intervening so aggressively in the conflict. Aiken had refrained from criticizing Lyndon Johnson too aggressively following the President's July 1965 decision to significantly augment American forces in Vietnam. Aiken had continued to believe that Johnson was committed to finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Vietnam. Following his trip to Vietnam, however, Aiken's desire for an end to the hostilities became more pressing. The Vermont Senator began to urge the administration to scale back American commitments more forcefully.

During the last half of 1965, American forces were deployed in Vietnam in ever increasing numbers. By December 31, 1965, there were a total of 184,300 military personnel in South Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> On the ground the military situation appeared to improve, at least initially. It became clear by the Fall, however, that the 50,000-troop increase announced by Johnson in late July did not constitute the last deployment of men. *Newsweek* reported that the level of U.S. troops could increase to 300,000 by mid 1966. The administration continued to insist, however, that the South Vietnamese army was still responsible for the brunt of the fighting. The White House also insisted that progress was being made militarily.<sup>2</sup> By December 71% of respondents to a Louis Harris & Associates poll favoured holding the line in Vietnam while only 7% favoured getting out.<sup>3</sup> Although large anti-war demonstrations were held in the Autumn of

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Dean Burns, *The Wars In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, 1945-1982* (Oxford, 1984), p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> "GI's Pour In - And The War Looks Up", *Newsweek* (October 4, 1965), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> "Vietnam: Still On The Escalator", *Newsweek* (December 13, 1965), p. 27.

1965, the number of Americans who opposed the war remained relatively small. It appeared that Lyndon Johnson had, for the most part, managed to take the war off the radar screen.

The expressed optimism of politicians such as George Aiken more than likely contributed to the sense among Americans that the outlook was improving in Southeast Asia. In an interview a week after the President's July 30 announcement, Aiken conveyed a genuine sense of optimism about the war. Aiken was very encouraged that a peaceful solution could be found. Aiken said that he "didn't have very much hope two or three months ago, but I've been really encouraged in the last two weeks. I see a little daylight in Vietnam. It is foggy daylight, but I think things are looking better."<sup>4</sup> Aiken stressed once again his belief that President Johnson's main objective was peace. The Senator felt that Johnson was trying his best to achieve a settlement. Aiken pointed to the appointment of Arthur Goldberg as Ambassador to the United Nations as proof that Johnson was serious about seeking a peaceful solution. In fact the main source of Aiken's optimism was the use of the UN as a conduit to peace. In reference to negotiations between the United States and Russia, Aiken said that "both sides have to get away from the Vietnam thing. You can't jump away from it. If they get down to talking at a table, I think you will see the war wane. Then, maybe they can reach some agreement, but neither side will trust the other and the UN will have to be brought into to it to supervise any agreement."<sup>5</sup> Two weeks later, Aiken once again expressed his hope that the United Nations would play a constructive role in reaching a peace settlement.

Aiken was interviewed on the program *Opinion in the Capital* on August 22 by journalists William Theis and Mark Evans.<sup>6</sup> The Senator stated that he was very encouraged by Ambassador Goldberg's appointment. He believed that Goldberg would enter the job with great enthusiasm and was very hopeful that he would help to reinvigorate the United Nations. Aiken said that he believed the UN had been ill served by the American people and its politicians because the interest in the organization as a peacekeeping vehicle had waned considerably in the previous three or four years. Aiken felt that President Johnson had recommitted the United States to upholding the UN's integrity and viability. He recognized that getting the Soviet Union to agree to independent policing of Vietnam would be difficult. Aiken

---

<sup>4</sup> Burlington Free Press (August 7, 1965), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Opinion in the Capital* program, August 22, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 6.

compared it to having the United States agree to policing in an area such as Panama but he hoped that a renewed UN would have the credibility to assuage Russian fears. It was also revealed during the interview that Goldberg had in fact recommended to Johnson that he appoint Aiken as UN Ambassador. The fact that Aiken's name had come up in connection with the job reflects his ongoing interest and dedication to maintaining the integrity and viability of the UN as a peacemaking agent but he would have been too independent for Johnson's purposes.

Aiken also used the interview as a forum for expressing his views on China. Aiken derided the idea that resisting North Vietnamese aggression would aid in preventing China from dominating Southeast Asia, a notion that Aiken said had been forwarded by high military and administration officials as the greatest danger facing the world. The Vermonter ridiculed the fact that the United States was now in the process of trying to "knock the daylights out of the one country that has kept the Chinese from taking over Southeast Asia."<sup>7</sup> Aiken revealed that he had in fact underestimated the North Vietnamese himself. He said that he had thought that bombing North Vietnam would force Hanoi to invite China to aid in its defense by rushing millions of Chinese troops into the country. Aiken rather facetiously compared his mistake to that of administration officials who had pressured President Johnson to increase military pressure on North Vietnam. According to Aiken, they too had underestimated the will of the Vietnamese. Aiken said that he now believed that the North Vietnamese would resist Chinese encroachment into their territory as vigorously as they resisted American military interference.

Aiken was also asked if it remained possible for the country to have both guns and butter. The expense of funding both the war in Vietnam and Johnson's Great Society programs had begun to have a real effect on the budget. Aiken stated his view that if the war continued to escalate as it had during the past year the United States would have to think seriously about instituting wage and price controls. Aiken made it clear that he believed that one of the reasons the American people continued to support the administration's policy in Southeast Asia lay in the fact that the war had still not produced a debilitating effect on the American economy. The Senator warned that taxes would have to be raised to pay for the war and he envisioned serious inflationary pressure in the near future. Aiken warned that the public would become

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

increasingly dissatisfied with the war if they began to feel serious economic dislocation as a direct result of events in Southeast Asia. The Senator felt that it was imperative the war be stopped before the United States began to feel the economic consequences and he once again stressed that the UN had to serve a central role in achieving a peace.

On September 14 in an address to the annual convention of the leftist United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, Aiken talked further of the U.S. role in South Vietnam and in world security affairs. Aiken characterized his view of American foreign policy, saying that "the basic thrust of the efforts of the United States throughout the world is directed towards achieving social and economic well-being and military security."<sup>8</sup> Aiken said that the United States had to refocus itself on these goals. Its military intervention in Southeast Asia was a misguided attempt to impose a military solution to a seemingly intractable problem, one that is in need of a peaceful, negotiated settlement. The Senator stressed that a perfect solution to the crisis would not be easily achieved but that the "challenge carries with it opportunity - opportunity to demonstrate anew to ourselves and to the rest of the world that the United States stands willing and able to use its massive military and economic strength when necessary to further the aspirations of man and in defense of his freedom."<sup>9</sup> Aiken stressed, however, that the United States could not simply use its power to impose its will on other nations. Aiken told his audience that "things are not simple in the world anymore...the United States must reassess its power and influence in the world as it is today - not in the world of yesterday. It isn't the man who packs the biggest punch who makes the most friends or who is the most influential man in his community. So it is with nations."<sup>10</sup> Aiken said that the United States should use peaceful means such as helping to feed poor nations as a means of convincing non-aligned countries to follow America's example towards democracy, a process which he believed would be as effective as the use of military power.

At the end of September, Aiken took aim at two prominent members of the Republican Party and their views concerning the war. Henry Cabot Lodge, the recently reappointed Ambassador to South Vietnam, had sent a letter to President Johnson, portions of which had become known to the media, stating his view

---

<sup>8</sup> Senator George D. Aiken Press Release, September 14, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 52, Box 1, Folder 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

that he was opposed to negotiations. Lodge believed that the U.S. was in the process of turning the tide militarily and he advocated increasing the pressure on the Vietcong in an attempt to force them to surrender. Richard Nixon had recently returned from a tour of Southeast Asia and he let it be known that he agreed with the Ambassador's position. Aiken responded by saying, in a withering attack, that "if we take the advice of Lodge and Nixon on foreign policy, we will never run out of war."<sup>11</sup> Aiken stressed his support for Ambassador Goldberg and his contention that the United States was willing to enter into peaceful discussions concerning Vietnam. Aiken said that "Ambassador Goldberg is using his head. The United States doesn't want to be in the position of resisting peace. Lodge was never noted as being a 'dove' since I've known him. I believe that Arthur Goldberg is much nearer right than Lodge, we don't gain any prestige around the world by threatening to throw our weight around and beating someone into a pulp. We should stick up for our rights, but this doesn't mean we should oppose peace."<sup>12</sup> Aiken went on to say that the United States bore some of the responsibility for the crisis in Vietnam because it had let former South Vietnam Premier Diem "get taken out and assassinated. Lodge has to assume some of the responsibility for that."<sup>13</sup> Aiken was once again separating himself from the wing of the Republican party that was calling for increased military pressure in Vietnam. His criticism of Nixon and Lodge demonstrated once again Aiken's independence within the party, he was willing to criticize men whose views he disagreed with, regardless of political stripe.

On October 21, Aiken rose in the Senate to make a speech about American foreign relations in general and foreign aid in particular. In his view, the American public had become extremely disillusioned with foreign affairs for a number of reasons. First and foremost, according to Aiken, foreign aid was often sent to countries where the indigenous elite had no intention of investing their own money in their country's economy. Aiken believed that the vested interests of these countries were using foreign aid only to strengthen their own positions, when the American people realized this they questioned the policy of sending money to these nations. Aiken also said that the recent military skirmishes between India and Pakistan, in which both sides used arms supplied by the United States, revealed the folly of arming

---

<sup>11</sup> Burlington Free Press, September 28, 1965, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 3, Folder 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



potentially belligerent nations. Aiken said that "the United States has become the world's greatest supplier of military equipment - the munitions makers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>14</sup> The disillusionment among the American people, Aiken believed, had been solidified by revelations such as this and had led to a hardening of attitudes towards other countries. In Aiken's view, president Johnson was not leading the United States down a path of a more belligerent foreign policy but was rather merely reflecting the growing cynicism of America.

The greatest danger of this growing disillusionment lay in American attitudes towards the United Nations. Aiken said that "The American dedication to the ideal of a United Nations as an instrument to maintain international peace, to develop friendly relations among nations, to achieve international cooperation involving economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems, and, in general, to harmonize the actions of nations, has given way to disillusionment with the United Nations as a peacekeeping instrument."<sup>15</sup> Aiken lamented the fact that in his view the United States was returning to a period of isolationism, this time characterized with concern for narrowly defined national interests. Aiken called on Lyndon Johnson to present to the world an image of a tolerant nation willing to help those less fortunate countries of the world, believing that the President could help to change the attitudes of the American public. For Aiken this was vital to achieving peace in Vietnam because it would lead to a renewed confidence in the United Nations, the organization, which he felt, was the best vehicle for a settlement to the conflict in Southeast Asia.

The guarded optimism that George Aiken displayed in the Fall of 1965 towards the situation in Southeast Asia was shattered when the Senator joined Mike Mansfield and four other Senate colleagues on a trip to South Vietnam. Aiken viewed the situation on the ground as utterly hopeless. 1965 ended with Aiken feeling more pessimistic than ever about the crisis in Vietnam. The Senator's views on the war would solidify the following year but the basis of his dissension had been realized in 1964 and 1965. Aiken would slowly abandon his view that the Johnson administration was ready to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the crisis. His confidence in Lyndon Johnson as an agent of peace would continue to wane as the President continued to ignore pleas from the Congress to scale back American involvement. By 1968

---

<sup>14</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 27914.

Aiken was declaring publicly that the Johnson White House could not achieve peace and he called for the election of a new President.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield had lobbied Lyndon Johnson for months to get the President to send him on a trip to Southeast Asia. Johnson finally agreed to send Mansfield to Indochina in November of 1965.<sup>16</sup> The trip would be the Montana Democrat's fifth visit to the area.<sup>17</sup> Mansfield arranged to have four other Senators join him on the excursion; George Aiken, Edmund Muskie (D-Maine), Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), and J. Caleb Boggs (D-Delaware). In a press release Mansfield described the group's mission as going "to see, to ask, to listen, and to report. To the extent that we speak abroad, it will be solely to stress the essential unity of this government in the search for an equitable and lasting peace in Vietnam."<sup>18</sup>

The Senators visited countries elsewhere in the world as well. The group traveled to France, Poland, the Soviet Union, Rumania, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Japan. The Senators wanted to probe the attitudes that foreign governments had towards United States policy in Vietnam. In pursuit of this goal, the Senators met with as many government officials as possible. As Aiken recounted many years later, at the first stop of the trip, President Charles DeGaulle of France would meet only with Senator Mansfield.<sup>19</sup> This was the only case on the trip where Mansfield met alone with a country's leader, the remainder of the time the Senators participated in

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27913.

<sup>16</sup> The text of Johnson's letter of request to Mansfield, dated November 7, 1965, read as follows:

Dear Mike: It would be helpful to have the firsthand observations of yourself and some of your Senate colleagues on the situation in various areas abroad. I have in mind, in particular, the state of our relations with nations in Eastern Europe, southeast Asia, and Vietnam, and other such areas as in your discretion you might see fit to include.

I anticipate that this mission would result in reports by yourself and your colleagues which would provide useful supplements to the flow of information that comes through the regular channels of the executive branch. Moreover, the mission would provide an excellent opportunity to emphasize abroad the unity of the U.S. Government in the pursuit of an equitable peace in Vietnam and stable and mutually satisfying relations with all nations similarly inclined.

I know your burdens have been heavy during the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress. Nevertheless, I do hope you will see your way clear to undertake this mission and I assure you of the full cooperation and assistance of the executive branch in carrying out its purpose.

Sincerely, Lyndon B. Johnson.

George D. Aiken, J. Caleb Boggs, Daniel K. Inouye, Mike Mansfield, Edmund Muskie, *The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and the Shadow* (Washington, 1966), Appendix I, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Mansfield had previously visited Southeast Asia in 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1962. Gregory Allen Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1995), pp. 23, 35, 62, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Olson, p. 165. Even though Mansfield had pressured Johnson for months to send him on this mission he obviously remained on good terms with the President. At the same time that Mansfield and his group were using a government jet to conduct their tour, the White House forced William Fulbright to fly to a British Commonwealth Parliamentarians' Association meeting in New Zealand in a prop-driven C-118. Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 385. The Johnson wrath had not as yet focused on the Majority Leader.

<sup>19</sup> Charles T. Morrissey and D. Gregory Sanford, *That Man From Vermont: George David Aiken, An Oral History Memoir* (Burlington, Vermont, 1981), p. 180. Aiken described the refusal of DeGaulle to meet with the entire group this way, "Paris was the first stop. We got there on Sunday. DeGaulle, the president of France at that time, never came in to Paris, but he did come in that Monday, but he would only

discussions as a group. Aiken believed that the governments of Poland and Rumania were very friendly in their reception, much more so than Russia. In Aiken's view the shaky relationship that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union at that time tarnished the trip to Moscow. Aiken believed that Poland and Rumania, given the choice, would have been much more willing to establish closer ties with the United States. He recognized, however, that being in the Russian sphere of influence prevented Eastern European countries from leaning towards the U.S.<sup>20</sup>

From Europe the group went through Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Ceylon on their way to Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia. Before they arrived in South Vietnam, the five men also made stops in Hong Kong and the Philippines.<sup>21</sup> By the time the Senators arrived in Saigon they were well aware of the decidedly negative feelings that many foreign governments had towards the United States policy in Vietnam. Aiken later described the attitude of the heads of state of the countries they visited quite succinctly by saying that they thought the Americans were being "damned fools."<sup>22</sup>

Aiken retained vivid memories of their visit to South Vietnam. U.S. Military personnel and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge accompanied the group around Saigon during their three day stay. Their hosts tried to present an optimistic picture of the war but Aiken said later that the "hopelessness of the situation was impressed upon us."<sup>23</sup> Aiken recounted, in stark terms, the accommodations that he and Mansfield used during their time in Saigon. He revealed that he and "Senator Mansfield stayed with Ambassador Cabot Lodge for the three nights we were there," sleeping at the embassy residence because "the embassy itself had been blown all to pot before we got there."<sup>24</sup> Aiken said that it was "the first time I ever slept with marines outside the door and sand pits in the yard. The sand pits were there to receive any

---

talk with Mike. The rest of us met with other French high officials all right, the secretary of state and so on and so forth. But that was very interesting. He was probably the most aristocratic of any of the foreign leaders that I didn't visit with (chuckles)."

<sup>20</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, pp. 180-182. Aiken described the Polish government by saying "they certainly were not strongly pro-Russian although they had to go along with the Communist form of government."

<sup>21</sup> In an interview some years later Aiken rather prophetically described the situation in the Philippines this way, "too few people controlled or owned too large a percentage of the resources of that country. When too few people get control over too much of the resources of the country you can be almost certain that there's going to be dire trouble there later on." Morrissey and Sanford, p. 184.

<sup>22</sup> William Gibbons, Patricia McAdams, Anna Nelson, interview with George Aiken, October 19, 1978, Aiken Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Crate 61, Box 6, Folder 29A.

<sup>23</sup> Gibbons et. AL., p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Gibbons et. AL., p. 6 and Morrissey and Sanford, p. 184.

bombs which might be tossed over the fence into the yard.”<sup>25</sup> Aiken had come face to face with American policy in Southeast Asia.

During their time in Saigon the five men held meetings with various American officials. On December 2 the group had a formal meeting with Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland, among others. Lodge told the Senators that the introduction of additional American troops had, in his view, saved South Vietnam and turned the tide in favour of the government in Saigon.<sup>26</sup> He did concede, however, that the U.S. escalation had led Hanoi to send units of the North Vietnamese army into the South.<sup>27</sup> Westmoreland shared Lodge’s optimistic view that things had changed for the better. At the same time, however, he admitted, frankly, that the war would be a prolonged affair. He said that the “intensity of military action will continue to increase. I foresee the need for a great number of additional U.S. forces. I foresee a protracted conflict. We cannot afford this time to underestimate the enemy. And, as I see it, this war is beginning to take on an attritional character.”<sup>28</sup> Westmoreland went on to define attrition as “making it so expensive for North Vietnam to send troops down here that this will not be a productive course of action – in other words, to inflict such heavy losses on the Vietcong that we destroy his forces faster than he can destroy the ranks of the Government forces and the forces that the U.S. is able to bring in the country.”<sup>29</sup> The General outlined his strategy of forcing the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops into battles where they would have to stand and fight, thereby abandoning tactics of guerrilla warfare. Westmoreland viewed this blunt assessment of a long, drawn conflict in positive terms. The General believed that the Americans and South Vietnamese had begun to win the war and that perseverance and patience would achieve the desired results.

---

<sup>25</sup> Morrissey and Sanford, pp. 184-185. In an interview published December 26, 1965, Aiken commented that “All night long you could hear the mortar shells around the city and the second morning we were there was when they let off 250 pounds of plastic explosives at the billets where the Americans are stationed. They were just a little ways from us and we went right down. It was a real bloody mess.” *Vermont Sunday News* (December 26, 1965), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 7. Obviously the attempts by the Embassy and military officials to show the visiting Senators an optimistic view of the war had failed.

<sup>26</sup> Lodge said, “the arrival of United States troops has had a fundamentally constructive effect on the situation. The American presence changed the stagnation, the stalemate which had begun to deteriorate...and brought about a situation in our favour.” U.S. Mission Briefing for Codel Mansfield, December 2, 1965, pp. 1-2, Mansfield Papers, Series XXII: Leadership, 99, # 4.

<sup>27</sup> The Ambassador said, “the North Vietnamese began to react in order to restore the balance that had existed before, and began bringing in units of the Army of North Vietnam.” *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12. While stressing that the previous month had been the most intense of the war so far, Westmoreland told the Senators that 5300 enemy soldiers had been killed. Westmoreland was encouraged by the fact that enemy losses were so much higher than American losses. To the Senators, however, Westmoreland’s comments on the casualties suffered by U.S. forces must have seemed disquieting, at best. The General said, “There were 448 Americans killed, there were 1279 wounded in action, and there are 33 missing. The number killed in action represents approximately 35% of all Americans killed in action during the course of this war. As a matter of passing interest, so far in this war there have been 1353 American military men killed, 6266 wounded.” *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The five visitors did not share Westmoreland's sense of optimism. Mansfield began peppering the General with questions regarding the amount of land controlled by U.S. led forces and the number of American troops required to achieve Westmoreland's idea of victory. Westmoreland avoided answering Mansfield's repeated questions about American troop levels directly. The General refused to be pinned down on an exact number, he instead claimed that roughly double the 170,000 existing U.S. forces would be required.<sup>30</sup> The Senators also expressed concern about desertions in the South Vietnamese Army that were occurring at a rate of 90,000 a year.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the group questioned Lodge and Westmoreland about the apparent lack of support being demonstrated by American allies for the war effort. Mansfield was able to force the two men to admit that the United States funded South Korean forces already stationed in South Vietnam and that Philippine forces would require funding when they arrived.<sup>32</sup>

The five men, accompanied by Lodge, has separate meetings with various members of the South Vietnamese leadership including General Nguyen Van Thieu, Chairman of the National Leadership Committee, Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky, and Foreign Minister Tran Van Do.<sup>33</sup> The Foreign Minister made it clear that the introduction of American ground forces had improved morale tremendously but he believed that China controlled North Vietnam and that Hanoi could not cease hostilities even it desired to do so.<sup>34</sup> Tran justified the rampant corruption in Saigon by saying that "during a long war nobody is sure to whom they belong or whether they will be killed in a change of regime. So they assure their own interests first."<sup>35</sup> Prime Minister Ky agreed that China was the real source of the war, telling the Senators that China was the real problem in Southeast Asia and that the leadership in Beijing was intent on dominating of the entire region, starting with Vietnam. In response to a question from Mansfield regarding democratic reforms, Ky declared that he and his government were serious about initiating a process of free and fair elections in South Vietnam. At this point in the meeting Aiken raised his concern that government attempts at economic and social development lacked sufficient effort. In a series of

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Mansfield was persistent in his questioning of Westmoreland finally saying, "Is it a safe assumption to say that what you really have in mind is something under 500,000 American troops?" *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-18.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>33</sup> Olson, p. 168.

<sup>34</sup> Code: Mansfield, Record of Conversation with Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, December 3, 1965, Mansfield Papers, pp. 1-5, Series XXII: Leadership, 99, #4.

<sup>35</sup> Code: Mansfield, Record of Conversation with Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, December 3, 1965, Mansfield Papers, p. 4., Series XXII: Leadership, 99, #4.

questions Aiken made it clear that he believed that South Vietnam should concentrate its efforts on helping the poor through low cost housing, farm credit and other government led social programs.<sup>36</sup> In a meeting with the Chairman of the National Leadership Committee, General Nguyen Van Thieu, Aiken once again asked about social and economic progress. Thieu responded that he believed his government had attempted to develop programs in these areas. He stressed that an improvement in the military situation would alleviate problems that existed in these programs.<sup>37</sup> Aiken emphasized social and economic reform for two reasons; he believed that communism's greatest appeal lay with poor and destitute peoples and attacking this appeal could best be accomplished by helping to alleviate the suffering of poor South Vietnamese, and defeat of communism through military means was misguided and bound to fail. Aiken would return repeatedly to these two themes during the SFRC hearings into the war the following February.

These meetings had undermined, perhaps unwittingly, the efforts that American officials had undertaken to paint a rosy picture of the war and its future. Westmoreland had revealed that the war would be a long and costly affair. Lodge had been unable to provide any hard evidence that America's allies would ease the burden of the war. Westmoreland's views on the war, however, convinced George Aiken that the American people should be told the truth about the length and cost of the war. He would attempt to do so in the coming months. The comments by the South Vietnamese leaders also did not serve as any great comfort for the five men. Although the South Vietnamese leaders stressed their commitment to democratic and economic reforms, the Senators came away skeptical that these goals could be accomplished. It was plainly evident that mass corruption rather than real and lasting reform accompanied their stewardship of the country.

Aiken had opposed the expansion of the United States military presence in Vietnam almost from the start. His trip to Vietnam in 1965 served to confirm the suspicions he felt regarding U.S. policy. The trip cemented his opposition to the war. Although Aiken never expressly outlined a plan that called for an

---

<sup>36</sup> Codel Mansfield, Record of Conversation with Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky, December 3, 1965, Mansfield Papers, pp. 3-4, Series XXII: Leadership, 99, # 4. Aiken compared the situation in South Vietnam with that of the United States during the 1930s. He said, "you are doing what we had to do at one time, farm credit, low cost housing, aid to the poor. It is the only way to combat communism."

<sup>37</sup> Olson, p. 168. In response to a question from Senator Muskie about whether his government was really committed to democracy, Thieu revealed his autocratic bent when he said, "we need time to educate the people; brainwash them. We do not need to impose democratic institutions that they cannot use. We are not like the United States. Our people have not had time to be educated."

immediate withdrawal of American forces he nevertheless opposed every proposal by the Johnson administration to increase the number of troops in South Vietnam. Aiken believed that the United States had an obligation to protect those Vietnamese citizens threatened by the government in Hanoi. He regarded peace as the best way to achieve this safety. For Aiken the risks of fighting a major ground war in Southeast Asia far outweighed any tactical advantage to be gained in the larger Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. His first hand view of the conditions that existed in Saigon simply reinforced his belief that the United States was engaged in a quagmire of a war with serious and negative consequences for the American government and its military personnel.

When the five men returned from their trip on December 18, 1965, Mansfield issued a statement to the press. In it the Montana Democrat said that the United States should continue to work for peace above all else. He said that "negotiations are in the interest of all concerned, directly and indirectly, including the United States. The longer a solution is delayed, the more extended the destructiveness of the conflict will become, and the more difficult the restoration of a rational and durable peace."<sup>38</sup> Aiken told reporters that he agreed wholeheartedly with Mansfield's statement, as did the rest of the group. Aiken stressed the unanimity of the group and stated that there would be no minority views on the results of the extended overseas trip.<sup>39</sup>

Two days later Aiken elaborated on his views. The Vermont Republican, in remarks to reporters, outlined his belief that China was benefiting the most from military activity in Southeast Asia. Aiken said that "up to now Communist China is winning this war in Vietnam," commenting further that "Communist China is forcing us into a war against an ancient enemy [of China's]. For a thousand years the Vietnamese fought against China to prevent her overrunning Southeast Asia. While we're seeking to eliminate China's old enemy, we are at the same time exhausting our own energies."<sup>40</sup> According to Aiken, China was suffering no casualties at all in the war, so that in a sense the conflict was a no lose situation for the Chinese government. These comments once again revealed Aiken's belief that China

---

<sup>38</sup> *The New York Times* (December 19, 1965), sect. 1, p. 10, col. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *The New York Times* (December 21, 1965), sect. 1, p. 7, col. 1.

posed the greatest threat to American security in Asia and that the United States was increasing China's ability to dominate the region by weakening one of its traditional enemies.

In an interview with the *Vermont Sunday News* published on December 26 Aiken reiterated his view that China was benefiting enormously from the war in Vietnam. Aiken lamented the fact that, in his view, the United States was squandering its resources on a war that was extremely beneficial to one of its greatest Cold War enemies. The war was also proving detrimental to the United States in relations with its allies. According to Aiken, American allies were unwilling to offer any significant military aid to the conflict in Vietnam because "they are afraid that it will lead to a bigger war and they want no part of it."<sup>41</sup> As a result the United States bore the brunt of the fighting in Southeast Asia with nothing but negative effects for its status in Asia as well as the rest of the world.

In the interview Aiken also outlined his views concerning the U.S. bombing campaign in North Vietnam. Aiken believed that North Vietnam had drastically increased the rate of infiltration of men and material since the bombing had begun. According to the Vermont Senator a direct link existed between the increased infiltration and the decision by the United States to take the war to North Vietnam.<sup>42</sup> Aiken endorsed Mansfield's call for a bombing pause as a first step towards peace negotiations. The Vermonter also stressed that the conflict required additional American troops. When asked how many troops would be needed Aiken responded by saying, "well, that would depend on how many the other side throws in. It takes five of our men to deal with one guerrilla: that's the best estimate. If they put 200,000 more in, it'll take a million more of ours."<sup>43</sup> Aiken also envisioned a long war followed by an extended American presence in the area. This position echoed Westmoreland's assertion, made to the five Senators during their meeting with the General in Saigon, that the war would be one of attrition. Aiken again stressed his belief that the United States should concentrate its efforts, above all else, on finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. He recognized, however, the difficulty in achieving such a result. He said that it would require

---

<sup>41</sup> *The Vermont Sunday News* (December 26, 1965), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 7.

<sup>42</sup> The reporter asked Aiken directly if the infiltration was linked to the bombing to which he replied, "Oh yes! North Vietnam was not officially involved until the bombing started and then they got united and said 'let's go to town.'" *The Vermont Sunday News* (December 26, 1965), Aiken Papers, Crate 37, Box 28, Folder 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



"an understanding between the two sides, an understanding that probably has to be initiated without China's knowledge."<sup>44</sup>

Aiken made a point of praising the effort of the U.S. armed forces stationed in Vietnam, calling General Westmoreland an "excellent military man." Aiken illuminated his view that fighting a war halfway around the world was a daunting task for the United States made more difficult when faced with an enemy that can supply its forces by foot and move material very quickly. Aiken said that "it's going to be a very long job to win a military victory and we'd probably have to have complete mobilization to do it...and that assumes the Chinese will keep out."<sup>45</sup> On the question of whether the Chinese would join the war Aiken made it clear that although he was sympathetic to the view that China would remain on the sidelines, he considered it a risk not worth testing. He envisioned two scenarios that would bring the Chinese into the conflict, the bombing, accidental or not, of Chinese territory, or a massive escalation of U.S. military activity, including the wholesale bombing of Hanoi. Aiken considered any action that would bring the Chinese into the war a mistake of monumental proportions, to be avoided at all costs.

Ultimately Aiken was unable to offer specific ideas that would help the United States bring the conflict to a peaceful end. The Senator was also unwilling to subscribe to the notion that the United States should simply withdraw its forces from Vietnam. He believed that the U.S. should honour its commitments to the people of Vietnam. He was critical of the American government's efforts, however, to bring about peace. He deemed them unsatisfactory to date. Aiken believed that the United States was underestimating the enmity that North Vietnam had towards China. On January 11, 1966, he commented that "the whole world is apprehensive over possible Chinese domination in the Far East - even North Vietnam," saying further that a war with China was foolhardy to contemplate because "how can you conquer 700 million people? Japan found out they couldn't."<sup>46</sup> That same day Aiken also proposed that the United States resist expanding the war any further. He said that perhaps an alternative to a faulty peace settlement or a general Asian war rested with the use of time. He said that "time doesn't mean so much in Asia, we can hold on where we are, render the assistance we can to the South Vietnamese government in controlling

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *The Bennington Banner* (January 12, 1966), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8.

the bandits - and the war might wear itself out."<sup>47</sup> This suggestion, although naive, was a harbinger of a more famous and well thought out approach that Aiken would advocate in the Fall of 1966.

Mike Mansfield had gone to the White House on December 19, 1965, to give Johnson an oral report on the group's tour and to present the President with the written report, entitled *The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and the Shadow*. Mansfield also gave Johnson a memo that summarized the main points of the more lengthy report. Mansfield apparently believed that Johnson had grown weary of reading Mansfield's detailed memos outlining his opposition to the war. The summary was thereby a means through which the Montana Senator could try to engage the President's attention to the report.<sup>48</sup> Mansfield presented two reports to the President. The private one was more negative and critical of U.S. policy than the public report.

The public report was released on January 6, 1966.<sup>49</sup> The report began by detailing the reasons for the introduction of large numbers of American troops into South Vietnam during 1965. According to the report the deterioration of the Saigon government and the accelerated military drive conducted by the Vietcong required an American military presence. Although U.S. forces had alleviated the pressure on the South Vietnamese government and had stabilized the situation to some degree, the report stated that the Vietcong had reacted to further U.S. pressure by increasing the number of troops at their disposal by intensifying local recruitment and stepping up the infiltration of regular North Vietnamese troops into South Vietnam. As a result, the intensity of the war had heightened, with American troops being "directly involved in battle to a much greater degree than at any other time in the history of the Vietnamese conflict."<sup>50</sup> The report outlined the fact that with increased intensity had come increased casualties.<sup>51</sup>

While pointing out the increased risks faced by American soldiers, the report made it clear that the introduction of U.S. troops had had a positive psychological effect on those areas in South Vietnam held

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Olson, p. 169. Mansfield also met with Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara to discuss the full details of the report.

<sup>49</sup> The public report, later referred to as the Mansfield-Aiken report, was co-authored by the two men, although Mansfield's input was more than likely the dominant one.

<sup>50</sup> George Aiken, J. Caleb Boggs, Daniel Inouye, Mike Mansfield and Edmund Muskie, *The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and the Shadow* (Washington, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* According to statistics included in the report, in November of 1965, 469 Americans were killed in action while 1470 men were wounded and 33 declared missing. The number of deaths represented 35% of the total of deaths incurred by U.S. troops during the entire history of the conflict.

by government forces. This had led to greater government stability, which in turn allowed Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky to initiate social and economic reform. The report stressed that Ky, with substantial U.S. aid, was attempting to protect and improve the welfare of the South Vietnamese population by trying to insure that food staples such as rice and fish were readily available. The government was also showing initiative in areas such as pacification, the program wherein police, economic and social organization was brought into the countryside hamlets, as well as low-cost housing and land redistribution. However, the report was bleak in its assessment of the success of these programs. It detailed the fact that the Vietcong was able to disrupt the flow of food from the countryside to the cities because they still controlled a great deal of rural territory. The report pointed out that although the government of South Vietnam controlled areas inhabited by 60% of the population, much of it remained centered in the cities. The arrival of U.S. troops had not eliminated the ability of the Vietcong to control vast tracts of the countryside.

The report was also distinctly negative about the attitudes of South Vietnam's neighbouring countries. As the report stated, "Those countries nearest to Vietnam see in the spread and increasing intensity of the warfare a heightened danger of a spill over into their territory."<sup>52</sup> Laos, Cambodia and Thailand had all, to varying degrees, been touched by the war and, according to the report, sought, above all else, to resist involvement. Burma, the Philippines and Japan, while safe from the danger that the war would spread to their territory, shared the desire to stay out of the war. The only country, which seemed to offer the hope of material assistance was South Korea. The others, read the report, "have their own internal problems. Each has varying degrees of internal stability. Each has as a principal concern, the avoidance of direct involvement in the Vietnamese conflict."<sup>53</sup> The countries of Southeast Asia, the report outlined, were anxious for the United States to continue playing an important role in the region but they did not wish for that role to become overwhelming.

The report also presented the views of the Soviet Union, Poland, Rumania and China. In their opinion, the five Senators believed that these countries firmly supported Hanoi and the Vietcong while at the same

---

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9. The report pointed out that removing Korean troops from South Korea created problems in the military balance of power between North and South Korea. The report stated that "it should not be overlooked that peace in the Korean peninsula is still held together by a tenuous peace."

time holding the United States responsible for the continuation of the conflict. They did not believe that Moscow would take any direct or constructive role in helping to achieve a peace settlement. Poland and Rumania were more likely to make a contribution but only in so far as their situations allowed. The report also pointed out that Hanoi was becoming increasingly dependent on China for supplies and that China was encouraging North Vietnam to resist negotiations or compromises. As North Vietnamese dependence on China deepened, the five men believed that a settlement reached without the tacit support of China would become more and more unlikely.<sup>54</sup>

Many of the conclusions reached in the report were quite bleak. While the military situation remained stalemated, the Senators envisioned a long term commitment if the United States pursued either a military or diplomatic solution. The introduction of American combat troops had served to blunt but not turn back Vietcong forces. As the United States increased its level of troops, the Vietcong matched them with increases of their own. As a result, while the scope and intensity of the conflict had increased along with a greater role for U.S. troops, the situation had remained roughly the same as it had been before the U.S. escalation.

The assessment of future military operations was equally negative. The report contended that the Saigon government would more than likely be unable to maintain its present constricted position without the further introduction of U.S. troops. By extension, increased troop levels did not guarantee positive results. Indeed, predicting the number of American forces needed remained impossible. On this question the report stated,

For the fact is that under present terms of reference and as the war has evolved, the question is not one of applying increased U.S. pressure to a defined military situation which is, in effect, open ended. How open is dependent on the extent to which North Vietnam and its supporters are willing and able to meet increased force by increased force. All of mainland Southeast Asia, at least, cannot be ruled out as a potential battlefield.<sup>55</sup>

The report was also starkly pessimistic in its prediction of the aid that the United States could expect to receive from its allies. The South Vietnamese government would not, in the immediate future, be able to

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. The Senators also outlined the reasons that they believed China had so far resisted becoming involved in the war directly. They wrote, "For the present, however, the Chinese appear to take the view that their direct intervention in Vietnam is not required since: (1) the war in South Vietnam is a people's war which the Vietcong are winning; (2) North Vietnam is successfully defending itself; (3) the more the United States escalates the war the higher our casualties will be and the more discouraged we will become; and (4) the United States cannot win, in any event, according to Chinese theories."

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

carry a greater burden of the war because most of its energy would have to be devoted to a "vast and continuing undertaking in social engineering in the wake of such military progress as may be registered."<sup>56</sup> The Senators envisioned this as a process taking many years to complete. If the war continued to expand America's other allies would become increasingly disenchanted. The strain on U.S. relations with friendly countries in Europe and the Far East faced greater and greater pressure. The United States could not expect to receive any significant help in its war effort from other nations. The Senators concluded that the leaders of most of the nations they had visited were anxious for a peace settlement as soon as possible.

Essentially the United States was faced with two difficult and disturbing options. The first option involved seeking to negotiate a settlement to the conflict. The five men could not predict with any certainty what might materialize from these negotiations. They recognized that this was not a very satisfactory prospect but it became more attractive after considering the second option.<sup>57</sup> This option involved a spiraling military expansion with no clear end in sight. It would force the United States to repeatedly commit additional forces to the conflict. This option did not come with a guarantee of success. a prospect the report found disquieting.<sup>58</sup> The report's concluding paragraph did not offer Lyndon Johnson an easy solution to the crisis. It read.

In short, such choices as may be open are not simple choices. They are difficult and painful choices and they are beset with many imponderables. The situation, as it now appears, offers only the very slim prospect of a just settlement by negotiations or the alternative prospect of a continuance of the conflict in the direction of a general war on the Asian mainland.<sup>59</sup>

Although the public report was indeed very pessimistic, the private report was even more so.<sup>60</sup> On January 11, 1966, Mansfield and Aiken met with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in executive

---

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12. This was not meant to be a criticism of the government in Saigon. The report stated that "This is in no sense a reflection on the caliber of the current leaders in Vietnam. But the fact is that they are, as other Vietnamese Governments have been over the past decade, at the beginning of a beginning in dealing with the problems of popular mobilization in support of the Government. They are starting, moreover, from a point considerably behind that which prevailed at the time of President Diem's assassination."

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12. The report read, "Negotiations at this time, moreover, if they do come about, and if they are accompanied by a cease-fire and standfast, would serve to stabilize a situation in which the majority of the population remains under nominal control but in which dominance of the countryside rests largely in the hands of the Vietcong."

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13. The report read, "What also needs to be borne in mind, however, is that the visible alternative at this time and under present terms of reference is the indefinite expansion and intensification of the war which will require the continuous introduction of additional U.S. forces. The end of that course cannot be foreseen, either, and there are no grounds for optimism that the end is likely to be reached within the confines of South Vietnam or within the very near future."

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Mansfield authored the private report alone. Aiken made it clear, however, that he supported all of the conclusions reached in the private report. President Johnson was made aware of Aiken's unqualified support. Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., p. 371.

session, to present the private report to their colleagues. Aiken reported to his colleagues that he believed that Saigon was virtually a city under siege because the Vietcong had surrounded the area and made it very difficult to travel outside of the city limits. He also told his fellow committee members that bombing Hanoi would bring severe consequences for Saigon, saying "Saigon could be devastated in very short order if Hanoi were bombed. It is just as simple as that. They were all over the place. They made their presence known, you could hear mortar fire, planes going over dropping bombs, most any time of night you wanted to wake up."<sup>61</sup> Mansfield told his colleagues that he believed that the United States would be forced to commit significantly more troops to Vietnam if the situation did not change. Mansfield decried the fact that the United States had no clear cut military goal in Vietnam, a situation that he believed was extremely detrimental to U.S. policy. The Montana Democrat also told the committee that North Vietnam had the capacity to match any and all American troop escalations, hence his contention that the conflict was open-ended.<sup>62</sup> In this report Mansfield was very negative regarding allied support for the war, more so than in the public report. He maintained that the United States was not receiving any significant support from its allies and that claims otherwise were "grossly misleading and, as propaganda, fools nobody except ourselves."<sup>63</sup> Mansfield placed special emphasis on a number of key points. Among them were the increasing threat of a war with China, the danger to the Western Alliance, the risk of rupturing the Japanese-American relationship and the fact that the Soviet Union enjoyed a great advantage diplomatically as well as militarily by being able to remain on the sidelines.<sup>64</sup> Mansfield was also extremely pessimistic about the chances for a quick military victory in his private report.<sup>65</sup>

Mansfield concluded the private report by stressing his belief that increased military action by the United States would not guarantee that North Vietnam would enter into negotiations. The Montana Democrat envisioned a situation where the opposition would continue to increase their manpower in order

---

<sup>61</sup> *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), 1966, vol. XVIII (Washington, D.C., Govt. Print. Off., 1993), p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 17-27.

<sup>63</sup> Olson, p. 171.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Regarding the number of U.S. troops that would be needed to prosecute the war, Mansfield wrote "it is not too early to begin to contemplate the need for a total upwards of 700,000. A realistic reckoning would be that there will have to be many defeats of the enemy and years of attrition before a military conclusion may be expected. And the realistic requirement had better be seen not as 170,000 men or 300,000 men or even double that figure but, rather, as an open-ended requirement of unpredictable dimensions. It is time not only to disabuse ourselves of any notions, if there are any left, that we can compel the North Vietnamese to 'leave their neighbours alone' at small

to match any and all U.S. expansions. He wrote, rather gloomily, that "in my judgment this struggle will go on, at least, as long as North Vietnam wants it to go on and has the means to pursue it."<sup>66</sup> As a means of avoiding this fate Mansfield ended by endorsing the enclave approach, defending those areas presently held by the South Vietnamese government. He wrote, "This is a conflict in which all the choices open to us are bad choices. We stand to lose in Vietnam by restraint; but we stand to lose far more at home and throughout the world by the pursuit of an elusive and ephemeral objective in Vietnam."<sup>67</sup> A satisfactory resolution to the war was not envisioned by Mansfield, the Majority Leader could see nothing but trouble in Southeast Asia. George Aiken later said that he believed that the report was a very accurate description of the situation as it existed in Vietnam. He added that "of course, the report that was printed was available to the public; however, there was a report made to the President which was perhaps more open, more factual, plainer talk than the one which was made public. But that was a good report."<sup>68</sup>

Although the public report did receive some press coverage, it was not greeted with a tremendous amount of attention. The reason for this was simple, congressional visits to Vietnam had become almost commonplace. Over one hundred members of Congress had visited Southeast Asia by this time, many during the recent break between congressional sessions. *Newsweek* alluded to the report in a story detailing the expected rise in criticism that Johnson could expect from the returning Congress. The article described the report as being "bleakly pessimistic about the war."<sup>69</sup> *U.S. News & World Report* devoted only a small article to the report, referring to it as "one of the gloomiest reports to come out of the Vietnam war."<sup>70</sup> The article highlighted the main points of the report, emphasizing that a general war in Asia had become a real and dangerous possibility.

Neither of these two articles referred to a private report but an article in the January 9 edition of *The New York Times* did make mention of it. The article described the public report as bleak, postulating that

---

cost to ourselves and in short order." William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II: July 1965 - January 1968* (Princeton, 1995), p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> Gibbons, p. 136.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Johnson Library, George Aiken Oral History, October 10, 1968, p. 16. Aiken was also asked if the private report was more pessimistic than the public report. In response Aiken said, "I shouldn't say, but I think it was in plainer language—let's put it that way. And it was made very plain to the President that we really had a bear by the tail—that's an expression they use up where I come from—you couldn't hang on and couldn't let go. The war was open-ended and there was no end in sight as things were going then."

<sup>69</sup> "A Fretful Congress Confronts Vietnam", *Newsweek*, January 17, 1966, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> "Mansfield Report: Real Danger of Bigger War", *U.S. News & World Report*, January 17, 1966, p. 11.

the report's main recommendation involved the United States trying to achieve the best possible peace settlement that it could without compromising its honour. It was seen as a potential rallying point for those Senators who had become increasingly disenchanted with the war in Southeast Asia. The article's author, E. W. Kenworthy, went on to describe the private report. He wrote, "A longer, more detailed, franker and tougher version of this public report was given to President Johnson by Senator Mansfield, the Majority Leader, on Dec. 19, the day after his return. So grim, in fact, was the secret report to the President that officials agree it was a strongly contributing factor in Mr. Johnson's decision to order the pause in the bombing of North Vietnam."<sup>1</sup> The President had, during this period, been contemplating a suspension of the bombing, it seems apparent that the report had pushed him further in this direction.

The Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, had been urging Johnson to initiate a bombing pause since a trip to Vietnam in late November of 1965. That trip had shaken McNamara's belief that the United States could win a war in Southeast Asia. He now envisioned a long and hard war, with no guarantee of success. General Westmoreland had outlined to McNamara plans to increase the level of U.S. forces to 400,000 in 1966 with a possibility of adding 200,000 more the following year.<sup>2</sup> McNamara stressed to Johnson the need to attempt a peace offensive before embarking on steps to further escalate the conflict. In a November 30 memorandum to Johnson, McNamara outlined his reasons for attempting a bombing pause. He wrote, "we must lay a foundation in the mind of the American public and in world opinion for such an enlarged phase of the war and, second, we should give North Vietnam a face-saving chance to stop the aggression."<sup>3</sup> After an intense policy debate within the administration during the month of December, Johnson decided to initiate a bombing pause on December 22, 1965. It would last for thirty-seven days.

In the early part of December, in the midst of the administration's debate, Secretary of State Dean Rusk asked a foreign service officer traveling with Mansfield in Southeast Asia, Francis Meloy, to seek

---

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, (January 9, 1966), sect. 1, page 1, col. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, (New York, 1996), p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gravel ed., *The Pentagon Papers*, (Boston, 1971), p. 33. In the same memo, McNamara wrote further that he was "seriously concerned about embarking on a markedly higher level of war in Vietnam without having tried, through a pause, to end the war or at least having made it clear to our people that we did our best to end it." Quoted in McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 223.



the Majority Leader's reaction to a bombing pause.<sup>74</sup> Mansfield, after consulting Aiken, gave his support to the pause on the condition that the United States vigorously attempt to seek a peace settlement. Mansfield also made it clear that he believed a bombing pause should be accompanied by a cease-fire, lasting upwards of a month.<sup>75</sup> The Senator believed that the arrival of U.S. troops had buttressed the Saigon government enough so that psychologically South Vietnam could withstand the effects of a pause. He also believed that bombing had not had a lasting effect on the infiltration of men and material into the South and that it had, in fact, hardened the North Vietnamese will to fight. Mansfield had made it clear that he and Aiken sided with those in the administration who endorsed a bombing halt. While Johnson had all but made up his mind to resume bombing by the time Mansfield met with him on December 19 to present him with his thoughts on the worldwide trip, the negative assessments contained in the two reports hardened Johnson's decision.<sup>76</sup>

The Johnson administration unleashed a massive peace offensive during the thirty-seven day bombing pause. Johnson sent Rusk, vice-president Hubert Humphrey, Ambassadors Harriman and Goldberg as well other administration officials to more than forty countries to explore possibilities for peace. Rusk released a fourteen point program detailing the U.S. negotiating position. Among them were calls for unconditional negotiations and discussions. The administration maintained, however, through words and actions, that the Vietcong would not be allowed to participate in the formation of any new government in South Vietnam.<sup>77</sup> This was in direct contrast to preconditions set by Hanoi. North Vietnam insisted that the Vietcong had to be included in a new government. They also insisted that American interference in Vietnam represented a clear violation of the Geneva Accords. In order to comply with the Accords, the United States, according to Hanoi, would have to withdraw all of its troops from Vietnam and cease military actions against their country. Hanoi had pledged not to enter negotiations before these conditions

---

<sup>74</sup> Rusk and Johnson initially opposed the idea of a bombing pause. They were slowly convinced by other members of the administration, including McNamara and George Ball, that a pause was worth a try. Johnson continued to worry that the White House would be subject to criticism if a pause was attempted without success, prompting the administration to resume bombing North Vietnam. As Johnson wrote in his memoirs, he felt that "we received little credit for stopping the bombing and heavy criticism for renewing it." Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (London, 1971), p. 235.

<sup>75</sup> Olson, pp. 171-172, and Gibbons, p. 120.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson told George Ball at the end of December that he still doubted that the bombing pause would have a positive effect in terms of negotiations but that they were "in effect doing what Mansfield has said." Olson, p. 172.

<sup>77</sup> George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1979), p. 166.

were met. The two sides, unwilling to budge from their positions, had created an unbridgeable gap to peace."<sup>78</sup>

At the end of January, Ho Chi Minh, the leader of North Vietnam, released a letter denouncing the terms set by the United States. He referred to the bombing pause as a "sham peace trick" and demanded that the U.S. "end unconditionally and for good all bombing raids and other attacks against North Vietnam."<sup>79</sup> North Vietnam was unwilling to accept what it viewed as the interference of the United States in Vietnamese affairs. Johnson, skeptical about the bombing pause from the beginning, was furious. On January 31, 1966, the President resumed and greatly expanded the bombing of North Vietnam.<sup>80</sup>

The resumption of bombing caused great consternation among Senate doves. There had been unanimity of support for the bombing pause among these men. The number of Senators doubting the direction of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia had, in fact, steadily increased throughout 1965 to the point where, by one estimate, at least a third of the Senate fell into this group.<sup>81</sup> Johnson was still backed by a majority of both Houses of Congress but severe cracks had begun to show in his support, among both hawks and doves. Dissenters such as Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) and George McGovern (D-South Dakota) gave speeches in the Senate calling for further extensions to the bombing pause.<sup>82</sup> John Sherman Cooper (R-Kentucky) also made a speech emphasizing the need for negotiations and not escalation. Criticism on the other side of the debate increased as well. Senators Everett Dirksen (R-Illinois), Richard Russell (D-Georgia), John Stennis (D-Mississippi) and Stuart Symington (D-Missouri), among others, called for increasing the military pressure in Vietnam.

The Johnson administration was well aware of the increasing uneasiness in Congress. During the month of January efforts were made to ease the concerns of the Senate dissenters. Administration officials

---

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166. There were a total of eight bombing pauses during the life of the Johnson administration. Johnson continued to believe they were ineffective. In his memoirs he wrote, "The net result of all these bombing pauses was zero. Indeed, it was less than zero for us, because the enemy used every pause to strengthen its position, hastily pushing men and supplies and equipment down the roads of North Vietnam for massive infiltration into the South." Johnson, p. 241.

<sup>81</sup> Walter A. Zelman, *Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968* (Los Angeles, 1971), p. 175. Zelman's estimate did not take into account those Senators that believed the original commitment to have been a mistake but who felt they had no choice but to support troops already in the field. Johnson's support among these Senators was very tenuous in some cases.

<sup>82</sup> Gibbons, p. 139. McGovern's speech, although a bit overblown, was, in some ways, prophetic. He said, in part, "The war in Vietnam will either begin to move this year toward a peaceful resolution-however slow and uncertain the road-or it will degenerate into a deepening morass that may claim the lives of our sons and the sons of Asia for years to come. A major war in the Asian mainland could exhaust America's blood and treasure for all our days and in the end create conditions of bitterness and despair that would curse us for a generation." Quoted in Gibbons, pp. 139-140.

met with various members of the Senate in an attempt quell the rising opposition. Johnson sent Ambassador Goldberg to the Hill to talk to as many of the leading members of Congress as possible.<sup>83</sup> All of these efforts were for naught, however, as the dissent hardened by the end of the month. On January 27, Senator Vance Hartke (D-Indiana) organized the writing of a letter to Johnson expressing support for the recent statements made by Fulbright, Aiken and Mansfield calling for an indefinite end to the bombing.<sup>84</sup> Fifteen of Hartke's Democratic colleagues signed the letter. Johnson's cursory response to the note, stressing once again his belief that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave him the authority to act as he saw fit in Vietnam, offended the signers and cemented their opposition.<sup>85</sup>

A survey conducted by the Associated Press at the end of January highlighted the split, which existed in the Senate. Of those Senators willing to respond, twenty-five said they opposed the resumption of bombing and twenty-five said they favoured renewing air strikes against North Vietnam.<sup>86</sup> Many Senators also revealed a refusal to commit themselves to a particular position, as thirty-nine declined to participate. Those who opposed the resumption of bombing stressed the fact that renewed attacks would, in their opinion, destroy any remaining chance to negotiate a settlement. Some of those Senators in favour of continued and extended bombing also expressed a desire to see more areas targeted. Senator James O. Eastland (D-Mississippi) exemplified this view by saying that industrial areas as well as food supplies should be bombed.<sup>87</sup> President Johnson, while not going as far as Eastland proposed, declined to accept the advice of the Senate doves and allowed the military to order more air attacks.

The day that Johnson gave this order, January 31, George Aiken gave an extended speech in the Senate. At the time, twenty Senators were on the floor of the chamber. The discussion, which ensued, was described by *The New York Times* as the first instance of a real debate on Vietnam taking place in the

---

<sup>83</sup> In a letter to the President, Goldberg described the attitudes of the men he had talked to. Concerning Aiken and Mansfield Goldberg wrote that they were "enthusiastic about the peace initiative, gravely concerned about the future events in Vietnam, anxious that sufficient time be allowed for the peace moves to germinate and concerned and troubled about any escalation of the Vietnam war." Quoted in Gibbons, p. 138.

<sup>84</sup> Some of the Senate's more notable dissenters did not sign the letter including Mansfield, Fulbright and the Kennedy brothers. No Republicans signed the letter because Aiken had asked its sponsors not to circulate the letter amongst Republicans because it was an idea originated by Democrats. *The New York Times* (January 28, 1966), sect. 1, p. 12, col. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Gibbons, p. 157. Aiken had said on January 25 that "if there is a likelihood of a slowdown of the fighting and a possibility of restoring any peace to southeast Asia, I would not resume bombings." Aiken also stressed his belief that bombing should not be resumed until North Vietnam made it absolutely clear that they would fight the war to a finish. *Washington Post* (January 27, 1966). Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Washington Evening Star* (January 26, 1966), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

Senate.<sup>88</sup> Aiken's speech led off the debate. The main theme of Aiken's address rested on the premise that the United States, under the direction of President Johnson, had committed itself to a war in Southeast Asia and must now prepare for any and all eventualities. Aiken wanted, above all else, to inform the American people of this fact and to make sure they understood the hardships to be faced and met.

Aiken made it clear from the outset that he believed that Johnson sincerely desired peace. The decision to resume and possibly increase the bombing of North Vietnam was, for Aiken, a momentous decision. He said that "since we have passed the point of no return, we should take a good, hard look at the situation as it is today."<sup>89</sup> Aiken remained disappointed with the way that the administration had handled the crisis. The Vermont Senator believed that the fight between the Western world and the Communist bloc was important and he was strongly in favour of continuing that fight. He did not, however, feel that Southeast Asia was the ideal place to wage that fight. The Republican also did not believe that combat was the ideal means of achieving success in this struggle. He said that "communism will not be defeated on the battlefield anyway except on the battlefield of men's minds."<sup>90</sup> Aiken regretted the fact that Russia and China had not reacted more positively to American peace efforts but he recognized that it was beneficial to these two countries to have the United States bogged down in a war in Vietnam.

Aiken then moved to the heart of his speech. He said, in part,

Our people, regardless of whether or not they support the acts of this administration, must be prepared for extraordinary sacrifice. This sacrifice will have to be paid in terms of resources, freedom, and life itself. There may be a chance that a world nuclear war can be avoided. There may be a chance that we may escape the devastating effect of a general land war in Asia, the kind of war we are least likely to win. We cannot proceed on the hope for miracles, however, therefore, we must be prepared for the worst - and without delay. President Johnson has asked for some \$13 billion with which to increase the tempo of the war in Vietnam. This \$13 billion is only the first drop in the bucket. Commonsense and experience should tell us that.

There is no sense in waiting until after election to recommend the inevitable. Lives are more precious than votes. Secretary of Defense McNamara asks for an increase of 113,000 men in the Armed Forces. Whom does he think he is kidding? Winning a guerrilla war requires a

<sup>88</sup> *The New York Times* (February 1, 1966), sect. 1, p. 14, Col. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Congressional Record, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., p. 1576. Aiken believed that Johnson was aware of how he would be viewed historically and this played into his desire to seek peace. He said that "any person in his position wants to be liked and admired as well as to earn a good spot in history. He wants to be highly respected by the rest of the world and, as President Eisenhower so ably demonstrated in 1953, the surest way to popular acclaim is through the restoration of peace."

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken felt that North Vietnam was not being held responsible for its role in the conflict by the rest of the world. He said, "since much of the world has regarded the bombing of North Vietnam as 'aggression' by the United States and since the assistance by the North Vietnamese to the Vietcong in carrying out their savage operations against the people of South Vietnam have been minimized, I believe that the President's peace offensive was necessary even though its effectiveness as a means of ending the war may be questioned. It seems to have convinced some nations of the justice of our assistance to South Vietnam, even though they are unwilling or unable to assist us." This last comment reveals that Aiken was well aware of the propaganda advantages of the Johnson peace offensive.

ratio of 10 to 1 on the side of the law, and the enemy already has 200,000 men in the field. The Secretary knows that an escalated war will require universal conscription. To wait until after the election to announce this is just another attempt to lull the people.<sup>91</sup>

Aiken went on to say that the United States had to prepare to adopt wage and price controls, to raise taxes to pay for the war, also to contemplate the use of ration cards and to insure that adequate nuclear shelters existed in the event they were needed.<sup>92</sup> Aiken again stressed that he had opposed the war from the beginning and that the United States should pursue peace above all else. He also made it clear, however, that he would support the President if and when the administration began to put the nation on a war footing. His reason for adopting this position was simple, he believed that dividing the "Nation in this time of crisis would be to court disaster."<sup>93</sup> He declared that "the most that is left to me now is the hope that the President is right and that I have been wrong. If, through the renewed action for which he assumes responsibility, the war can be brought to a quick and satisfactory ending, I will gladly admit the error of my judgment and be among the first to render him acclaim."<sup>94</sup>

Mike Mansfield immediately followed Aiken's speech and echoed, in a more conciliatory manner, many of the comments made by the Vermont Senator. He said that he would "do my best to support him (Johnson) to the best of my ability. I fully appreciate the difficulty and the agony of the decision which was his and his alone - to make."<sup>95</sup> The Senators that followed, mainly Democrats, gave grudging support to the President. Special praise was given to Johnson's decision to ask the Security Council of the United Nations to convene a conference devoted to establishing a peace settlement in Vietnam. Senator Fulbright said that "the wisdom of the policy may be questioned but we must back our men in the fight."<sup>96</sup> Senator

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1577.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken said that "we do not like to contemplate these things; yet they must be considered and acted upon unless the danger is far less than it now appears. This time we cannot wait until the catastrophe strikes."

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken also said, rather bitterly, that "I believe the President has erred in taking new steps which may lead to a cataclysmic world conflict. It appears, however, that my voice has been ineffective and that the President has decided to take such steps."

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* Mansfield also used this occasion to refer to Aiken as an owl, drawing a distinction between hawks and doves. Aiken had said earlier that he wasn't happy with the constant reference to hawks and doves, more owls were needed to bring about a solution. Mansfield said that Aiken "is the wise man, the man who looks ahead, the man who is unswerving in his support of the United States, but who is also aware of the dangers which confront us in any given situation." Aiken was often referred to as an owl from this point onwards. In an article, which first appeared in *The Washington Post* on February 8, 1966, Marquis Childs elaborated on the idea of Aiken as an owl. He wrote that Aiken's speech on the resumption of bombing "had a ring of candor so scarce on all sides of the Vietnam issue", saying further that "Aiken, in what was one of the most notable speeches in the Senate for a long time, stood foursquare for what he believes must now be done with the inevitable escalation of the war." Quoted from "Aiken Contributes Rare Wisdom to Vietnam Debate", *The Washington Post* (February 8, 1966), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8.

<sup>96</sup> *The New York Times* (February 1, 1966), sect. 1, p. 14, col. 3. Senator Robert Kennedy said, "if we regard bombing as the answer to Vietnam we are headed straight for disaster. The danger is that the decision to resume may become the first in a series of steps on a road from which there is no turning back - a road which leads to catastrophe for all mankind."

Russell Long (D-Louisiana) was the most vehement in defending the President's decision, stressing that in his view Johnson had no choice but to renew the bombing.<sup>97</sup> This Senate discussion, the first extended debate on Vietnam, was the precursor of many to come. The arena of debate would shift very quickly, however, from the Senate floor to the hearing room of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Aiken's role in the January 31, 1966 Senate debate on the war underlined the increasingly high profile that the Vermont Senator was taking regarding criticism of the administration's Vietnam policies. As 1966 progressed, Aiken's role would increase even more as he sought to convince fellow Republicans of the absurdity of having American forces involved in a war in Southeast Asia. Slowly, the tenor of Aiken's dissent had begun to change and he had become increasingly vigorous in his denunciation of the Johnson White House. Aiken's dissent did not, however, rise to the level of vitriol expressed by Wayne Morse and William Fulbright. Aiken's criticisms, although more and more pointed, continued to be offered in terms that Lyndon Johnson could accept. Unlike Senators Fulbright and Frank Church, Aiken continued to be invited to the White House. Although Aiken continued to find fault with administration decisions, he had as yet been unable or unwilling to offer a concrete proposal for ending the war. In October 1966, Aiken would finally spell out his plan for a peaceful denouement to the conflict.

---

<sup>97</sup> Long's spirited defense of administration policy drew this response from Aiken, "what disturbed me a little were the remarks of the Senator from Louisiana that we have to defend democracy wherever we find it in the world. I was wondering whether the Senator, well informed as he is on administration matters, could say whether there is any point beyond which we would not go to defend Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, India, the African countries, or any other place where democracy might be threatened? Is there any point beyond which we would not go?" Congressional Record, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., p. 1583. Aiken's claim that democracy in Vietnam was threatened seems to lack credibility coming, as it did, on the heels of Aiken's repeated criticism of the government in Saigon.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *AIKEN'S PLAN FOR PEACE*

In February 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a series of televised hearings on the war in Vietnam. The SFRC hearings on Vietnam were vital for the formation of the ideas that Aiken would present in a speech given on October 19, 1966. This speech, Aiken's most famous of the Vietnam era, was the most important statement he made on the war. Included in it was Aiken's most concrete proposal for extracting the United States from the war in South Vietnam. Ironically, the speech was misinterpreted and misunderstood so much in the years that followed that Aiken was remembered for something he never said nor wanted, namely that the United States could simply declare victory in Vietnam and get out. The actual ideas that Aiken presented in the speech were much more complex, realistic and credible than the idea presented later. Aiken's speech did not come out of the blue. Aiken had been forming the ideas throughout 1966 and his decision to give the speech came only after a deliberate and drawn out thought process. Aiken discussed the ideas enunciated in the talk with many of his colleagues as well as people he met and talked to during his trip to Vietnam and during the SFRC hearings.

The speech represented a milestone in another manner. Aiken had no desire to become a maverick like Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening. Aiken was a full-fledged member of the Senate's elite inner club and he had no intention of jeopardizing his position in that club. He enjoyed the status that he had achieved as a Senator and the fact that he was included in the decision making process of the United States government. It was not easy for Aiken to take a position at odds with his President. He did not take these positions lightly. He came to believe, however, that Johnson was circumventing the Senate and its Constitutional role of advice and consent. He believed that the executive branch had the right and the responsibility to conduct the day to day affairs of U.S. foreign policy but he also firmly supported the right of the legislative branch to be included in the process.

Aiken also realized that his earlier strategy, of offering Johnson quiet encouragement for those decisions and statements that he supported regarding Vietnam, was no longer effective. Aiken had tempered his criticism of Johnson during the Spring of 1966 but the President's decision to expand the bombing of North

Vietnam shook Aiken's faith and trust in the President. The speech in the Fall of 1966 was the beginning of a process for Aiken that soon led him to call, repeatedly, for the removal of Johnson as President. Aiken was willing to offer Johnson his support as long as the President proposed ideas that Aiken felt comfortable with. He believed that Johnson was not interested in expanding the war in Vietnam, any more than he absolutely had to, but the bombing decision in June 1966 meant that Aiken could not fully trust the President. The time had come for Aiken to make his own proposal for getting the United States out of Vietnam.

William Fulbright had been contemplating the idea of holding open hearings of the Foreign Relations Committee on the subject of Vietnam since the latter part of 1965. His treatment by Johnson and the White House had pushed him further in this direction.<sup>1</sup> On January 19, 1966, Johnson asked Congress for \$12.7 billion in supplemental funds for Vietnam including \$415 million in foreign aid.<sup>2</sup> This request provided Fulbright with a reason to hold hearings on the war. To this end Dean Rusk testified in executive session of the Committee on January 24. Fulbright and Rusk had testy exchanges over the direction of U.S. policy during this meeting.<sup>3</sup> At Fulbright's insistence Rusk was called back to testify, this time in open session, on January 28. The two men continued their confrontation, this time in full view of the television cameras.

Rusk was once again subjected to a long and intense session devoted not to the specific question of the foreign aid request but to general U.S. policy in Vietnam. Fulbright's questions centered on whether the Administration had the legal right to wage a war in Vietnam. Rusk vigorously defended the right of the White House to do so, referring to the terms of the SEATO treaty and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution for proof of this contention.<sup>4</sup> George Aiken's questions for Rusk were brief but pointed. The following exchange occurred between the two men.

---

<sup>1</sup> On January 25, 1966, Johnson deliberately snubbed Fulbright during a bipartisan White House briefing on Vietnam. Some of Johnson's staff, as well as Dean Rusk, had been urging the President to meet with Fulbright in an attempt to stifle the Arkansas's dissent. At that meeting only Mansfield and Fulbright voiced opposition to the resumption of bombing. Aiken was not present. When Fulbright began to speak Johnson engaged Rusk in an animated discussion until Fulbright finished, Gibbons, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Gibbons, p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Aiken's questions centered on three areas; whether North Vietnam would be amenable to peace negotiations with the Geneva Accords as a starting point, the prospect for democratic elections in South Vietnam and lastly, who was calling the shots in South Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union or Hanoi and the National Liberation Front. Rusk insisted that although China and the Soviet Union had tremendous influence on Hanoi, the North Vietnamese government remained the determining influence and the greatest obstacle to peace. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), 1966, vol. XVIII (Washington, D.C., : U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1993), pp. 152-154.

<sup>4</sup> This echoed Johnson's response to the Hartke letter, sent the same day. Reporter Felix Belair wrote, in regards to Rusk's appearance, that "Members of the Foreign Relations Committee openly challenged today the legality of the nation's deepening military involvement in the Vietnam war and demanded a detailed explanation of Administration policy. Rarely has a Secretary of State been



Aiken: Just one question, I was interested in the questions Senator McCarthy asked of the Secretary, I understood the Secretary to say that the other side would determine whether the United States becomes locked in a land war in Asia or not. Did I hear that correctly?

Rusk: In the sense, sir, that, just as when the other side moved large numbers of organized divisions across the parallel in Korea, we had to face the question of whether we would leave them alone, get out of the way, let them have it, or whether we would hit them.

Aiken: They will determine then whether we send 400,000 or 2 million men into Southeast Asia?

Rusk: I think, Senator, that-

Aiken: Don't you suppose they will be making other decisions for us perhaps if we agree that they have this one to make?

Rusk: Well, it is almost in the nature of aggression, Senator, that the initiative lies with the aggressor. If it would be left up to us there wouldn't be any shooting out there at all. We wouldn't have been there with troops. We want peace in the area, and we have wanted it for the entire postwar period. Now, when somebody else starts shooting, then decisions have to be made as to what is done about that, and by who, and what the responsibilities of the United States might be in that situation.

Aiken: That would apply to any part of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Aiken's worry, repeated in his January 31 Senate speech, revolved around his belief that southeast Asia constituted the worst place for the United States to get involved in a land war. The Vermont Senator also found the prospect of the United States committing itself to the defense of countries throughout the world in its battle with the Communist Bloc extremely disturbing. As far as Aiken was concerned, the United States was overextending itself and spreading its resources too thin. In his view, Vietnam did not represent an area of vital national interest for the United States and he did not want it to be represented as such.

The renewal of the bombing convinced Fulbright of the need to hold further public hearings on the war. At a February 3 executive session of the SFRC Fulbright, along with Aiken, Albert Gore (D-Tennessee) and Wayne Morse persuaded the other members to hold more hearings on Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> Fulbright directed

---

put through such a cross-examination by virtually all 19 members of the Senate committee." *The New York Times* (January 29, 1966), sect. 1, p. 1, cols. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Committee on Foreign Relations, Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966-Vietnam, Hearings*, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, p. 40. The other major witness of the day was David Bell, the administrator of the Agency for International Development (AID). Aiken's questioning of Bell centered on the level of investment made by private American companies in Vietnam. Aiken drew from Bell the fact that American investment was very low, a main reason being the harassment of the Vietcong. The Vietcong forced people to pay them tolls and taxes for the privilege of doing business in the countryside of Vietnam. Aiken drew laughter when, in reference to the military notion that it takes ten men to deal with one guerrilla and the fact that the Vietcong were holding up people in rural areas for bribe money, that "I believe it takes about 10 deputy sheriffs to cope with 1 desperado, doesn't it?" Pages 36-40.

<sup>6</sup> Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 402. Fulbright's staff had recommended that the Chairman discuss the idea of holding open hearings informally with Aiken, Mansfield and Bourke Hickenlooper (R-Iowa). Fulbright did so and then raised the issue during the SFRC meeting to discuss the findings of the Mansfield-Aiken Report. At that time Mansfield and Hickenlooper stated that it would be better to have closed meetings in order to allow members to express their views more freely. During a discussion over what time of day the hearings should be held, Aiken said, "I think we keep forgetting a third party which has an interest in this matter, and that is the public. And I think that the hearings we hold should be held at such a time that the public, even though they live a little ways out of town like Baltimore, will be able to attend, and I think it would be expecting a good deal of them to get in here at 8:00 o'clock in the morning or 8:30." U.S. Congress, Senate, *Committee on Foreign Relations, Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), vol. XVIII (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Gov. Print. Off., 1993), p. 238. Aiken obviously underestimated the impact the hearings would have in terms of press coverage. During a later exchange on witnesses, Aiken dryly suggested calling Ho Chi Minh as a witness.

Carl Marcy, the Chief of Staff of the SFRC, to obtain the widest possible coverage for the hearings.<sup>7</sup> Marcy's job had been made easier by the dramatic exchanges between Fulbright and Rusk on January 28. CBS and NBC had run lengthy excerpts from the exchange on their evening news programs. Fred Friendly, the president of CBS news, made the decision to televise the next round of the hearings live and NBC followed suit.<sup>8</sup> The hearings generated enormous amounts of publicity and focused the nation's attention on the war and the widespread differences, which existed between the executive branch and some members of the legislative branch of the government. William Fulbright emerged as the leading critic of Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policies.

The Foreign Relations Committee became the center of Senate dissent on the war. By the early part of 1966 "a majority of the SFRC were either deeply disturbed by U.S. involvement in the war or overtly opposed."<sup>9</sup> Only Senators Frank Lausche (D-Ohio), Dodd, Symington and Hickenlooper remained staunch supporters of the White House policies for Southeast Asia. The fact that the Hearings were being held seemed to signify that the critics had realized that their method of providing largely private dissent had failed. Private dissent was giving way to full-blown public dissent. Pressuring the White House into altering its Vietnam policies remained the main goal of the hearings, however, Fulbright and others on the committee hoped that this public display of Senate discontent would stimulate even greater dissent than that which already existed among the American people.<sup>10</sup>

The hearings were held on February 4, 8, 10, 17 and 18. A total of five witnesses appeared before the committee. The witnesses were David Bell, retired General James M. Gavin, George F. Kennan, retired General Maxwell Taylor and Dean Rusk. Defense Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary of State George Ball and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Earle Wheeler declined to appear.<sup>11</sup> Johnson had wanted to cooperate as little as possible with the SFRC. In order to draw as much attention away from the hearings

---

<sup>7</sup> Mike Mansfield kept Johnson informed of these decisions. White House aide Mike Manatos later claimed that both Mansfield and Aiken kept the White House informed of what was occurring on the committee. William C. Berman, *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist* (Kent, Ohio, 1988), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York, 1979), p. 504.

<sup>9</sup> Woods, p. 402.

<sup>10</sup> Zelman, p. 224.

<sup>11</sup> Zelman, p. 226. Senator's Dirksen, Symington, Long and Hickenlooper persuaded Johnson to have Taylor and Rusk testify. The Senators were worried that committee members sympathetic to the White House were unable to present the Administration's point of view forcefully enough. Woods, p. 406. The SFRC met on February 23 to determine whether the committee should call McNamara to appear in executive session. By a tally of eight to seven, the committee voted to ask McNamara to testify in executive session. Aiken told the committee that in his opinion McNamara had damaged his reputation by not agreeing to testify in open session. Aiken voted no, basing his vote on the notion that McNamara should testify in open session or not at all. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)*, 1966, vol. XVIII (Washington, D.C., : U.S. Govt. print. Off., 1993), pp. 251-267.

as possible, the President decided suddenly to fly to Honolulu for a summit meeting with Vietnamese President Nguyen Cao Ky. The networks actually cut away from the hearings on February 4 to present the details of the trip announced by Johnson in a press conference.<sup>12</sup>

Honolulu hosted the conference on February 6 - 8. Johnson played up the meeting as much as possible. Presidential aide McGeorge Bundy later described it as "a big farrago, meant to take the spotlight off the hearings."<sup>13</sup> In fact Bundy and the rest of Johnson's advisers only heard about the conference when the President announced plans for it. Due to the short notice the meeting did not have a precise agenda. Ky gave a bombastic speech prepared by the American Embassy and a joint communiqué, written by American officials on the way to Honolulu, was issued after the meetings ended. Johnson was not satisfied with this diversionary tactic alone, he had vice-president Humphrey meet him in Los Angeles for a briefing. From there, Humphrey, accompanied by U.S. officials returning from Hawaii, flew to Saigon to drum up as much publicity as possible.<sup>14</sup>

For all of Johnson's efforts, the hearings still generated enormous publicity. The appearances of Gavin and especially Kennan gave the dissenters a level of legitimacy that they had not had before. These two respected establishment figures revealed, with their criticisms of U.S. policy, how widespread the dissent had become. In his testimony, Gavin endorsed the policy of having U.S. troops occupy several enclaves on the coast of Vietnam. He opposed escalation and bombing, saying that the enclaves ought to be used to "get out, that's all. We are getting out. We're not staying there any longer. It was stupid to stay there."<sup>15</sup> Aiken's questions to Gavin centered on the viability of enclaves as well as the General's expected time frame for fulfilling the enclave strategy. Aiken also questioned Gavin on the degree of difficulty faced by American troops in fighting a land war in Asia.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> George W. Johnson ed., *The Johnson Presidential Press Conferences: Volume I* (New York, 1978), p. 398. In an attempt to draw attention from the expanding military commitment, Johnson stressed that the conference would deal primarily with political, economic and social matters. In telling the press Johnson, rather coyly, said "I am going to make another little announcement and you will probably want to ask me something on that."

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Woods, p. 403.

<sup>14</sup> Gibbons, pp. 233-234.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 240.

<sup>16</sup> *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966 - Vietnam*, pp. 249-251. Aiken asked Gavin "There are other reports which are rather puzzling in a way. Once in a while we read that a large body of allied troops, maybe as many as 10,000 or 15,000 surround a lesser body of Vietcong troops, possibly of regimental strength, and are drawing a net on them. Then a few days later, when the net has been drawn tight, we find that there are only a few of the Vietcong caught in it. What becomes of them? Where do they go? Would you have any guess as to what becomes of them?" Gavin's answer revolved around problems of security, environment and language in containing enemy troops. Aiken's point was simply that this type of guerrilla warfare was difficult for American troops to adapt to, no matter how well they fought.

The star witness of the hearings for Fulbright and his staff remained George Kennan. There was no more prestigious foreign policy figure than Kennan, the father of post-World War II containment policy. The former ambassador to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union represented the establishment figure that Fulbright needed to give credence to his and all anti-war dissent. Kennan firmly agreed with Gavin that the United States should not escalate the war any further. He called for the United States to withdraw from Vietnam as soon as it became possible to do so without undue damage to American prestige in the area. He also endorsed the enclave strategy while agreeing with Gavin that a precipitate withdrawal from Vietnam would be inadvisable.<sup>17</sup> Aiken's questions to Kennan revolved mainly around the degree of commitment that the United States had made to South Vietnam. Kennan and Aiken agreed that American commitments had turned into obligations, a situation fraught with danger for the United States.<sup>18</sup> The two also agreed that the Johnson administration had circumvented the procedures called for in the Constitution. Kennan said, "we have nevertheless involved ourselves here in a situation which, according to the consensus of the Fathers of our Constitution, would certainly have called for a great national debate and a very solemn decision in the Senate as well as in the executive branch."<sup>19</sup> Aiken's questions to Kennan seemed designed to confirm beliefs that the Vermont Senator already held.

Maxwell Taylor testified before the committee on February 17, 1966. Not surprisingly, Taylor, serving as a consultant to Johnson at the time, offered a strong defense of administration policy. Taylor rejected Gavin's enclave proposal while at same time maintaining that the White House wanted to keep the conflict as limited as possible. He carefully avoided defining the administration's idea of what limited meant.<sup>20</sup> The last witness, Dean Rusk, appeared the following day. The Secretary of State once again stressed that

---

<sup>17</sup> Zelman pp. 228-9 and Woods, p. 405. In his opening statement Kennan outlined his reasons for why he believed the United States should extricate itself as soon as possible from Vietnam. He said, in part, "If we were not already involved as we are today in Vietnam, I would know of no reason why we should wish to become so involved, and I could think of several reasons why we should wish not to. Vietnam is not a region of major military, industrial importance." Kennan proceeded to say that it was difficult to leave because the United States government had placed so much of its prestige on the line in Vietnam by terming it a defense against communism. "Voices of Dissent: Gavin and Kennan," *Newsweek*, February 21, 1966.

<sup>18</sup> *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966 - Vietnam*, p.384. Aiken said, "I have felt that we had a moral obligation to help the people of South Vietnam, but that did not necessarily mean that we must enter into a commitment to do our utmost." Kennan agreed, saying "Well, these commitments, as we now interpret them, go very far indeed. To commit yourself, in any way, to assure the internal security of another government, means to commit yourself to interference in the most vital process of its own internal political life, and this seems to me a commitment of such seriousness that it should not be lightly or casually slipped into."

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385. Aiken echoed Kennan's comments, saying, "I would think that to commit ourselves without limitation is certainly a pretty heavy responsibility for anyone to assume, particularly when processes are provided for senatorial advice and consent. I think it well to remind ourselves frequently that these processes are provided for by our own Constitution and our laws, and trust that anyone carrying the responsibility will remember it."

<sup>20</sup> Zelman, p. 230. Aiken questioned Taylor on the issue of American over-commitment. He described the U.S. as being in a position of biting off more than it could chew. Aiken also expressed his belief that U.S. forces would be increased once again and stressed the fact that American troops remained safe only on their bases. *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966 - Vietnam*, pp. 458-463.

administration policy was legal and justified under the terms of the SEATO treaty and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Rusk also emphasized that the American commitment in Vietnam was part of a greater struggle to prevent the Communist takeover of the world's weaker countries.<sup>21</sup> Aiken asked Rusk if the United States was obliged to fight communism wherever it existed and Rusk responded that the U.S. was committed to defending those countries with which the U.S. had formed an alliance.<sup>22</sup> Not satisfied with Rusk's responses, Aiken twice more asked if any limit existed insofar as U.S. obligations were concerned. Rusk refused to place any limits on the U.S. commitment. Aiken also tried to engage Rusk on whether or not the conflict was in fact a civil war but the Secretary of State steadfastly maintained that the external aggression of North Vietnam was the main cause of the war.

The extensive coverage of the hearings meant that most Americans became aware of them either by watching television, be it the live coverage or the summaries on the evening news, or through newspapers and magazines. The main accomplishment achieved by the hearings centered on the fact that dissent became much more politically palatable to the public. Opposing the war was no longer related simply to demonstrating college students. The hearings revealed that respected members of Congress and distinguished men such as Gavin and Kennan had become increasingly at odds with administration policy. The hearings, as Senator Claiborne Pell (D-Rhode Island) said, "made peace a respectable word and showed that disagreement is respectable too. If such a group of respectable stuffed shirts as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee could question this war, it gave other people the courage to question it."<sup>23</sup> The public did not immediately turn against the war in massive numbers but the hearings sowed the seeds for the widespread dissatisfaction that was to come. As far as influencing members of Congress was concerned the effect of the hearings was quite minimal. Those members that were at odds with administration policy had arrived at this position before the hearings began. Those who supported the White House were not swayed to a great degree by the hearings. More than anything, the hearings helped to entrench positions already held by members of Congress.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Zelman, p. 230.

<sup>22</sup> *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966 - Vietnam*, pp. 593-597. Aiken and Rusk squabbled over the number of countries this constituted. Rusk maintained that it was roughly forty countries while Aiken feared that eighty or ninety looked to the U.S. for assistance of this type.

<sup>23</sup> Gibbons, p. 249.

<sup>24</sup> Gibbons, p. 249 and Zelman, pp. 230-231.

George Aiken certainly did not use the hearings as a forum for expressing his displeasure with administration policy as vigorously as others on the committee did. It was simply not in Aiken's personality to disagree with committee witnesses in a confrontational manner. Aiken hewed to the Senate's tradition of decorum and manners, as a result, while Aiken's questions were at times pointed and direct, they were asked in a gentle and agreeable manner. Aiken refused to grandstand for the cameras, instead he acted much as he would have had the proceedings not been televised. Chairman Fulbright was clearly the most dominant voice of those on the committee. Senators Morse, Church and Gore were also more open in their criticism. In his questioning of the witnesses, however, Aiken made clear what he believed regarding the war. First and foremost Aiken believed that the conflict in Vietnam was largely a civil war and that it was a terrible place for the United States to be fighting a war. By extension, the U.S. ran the risk of over committing itself to an area that was, in Aiken's view, of little strategic importance to American interests. U.S. emphasis on a military solution to the problem of Vietnam specifically and the defense of American beliefs generally, was misguided. Aiken felt that a greater emphasis on economic aid remained critical.<sup>25</sup> The Vermont Senator was also disturbed by the fact that the administration had circumvented the legislative branch in its conduct of southeast Asian policy. While Aiken believed that the day to day handling of foreign policy must remain the purview of the executive branch, it disturbed him that the White House denied the Senate its Constitutional role of advice and consent. Finally, Aiken subscribed to the notion, put forth by Gavin and Kennan, that the United States should adopt an enclave approach to the war. He also shared their belief that the United States could not precipitously withdraw its forces from Vietnam but he believed that steps should be taken to de-escalate the conflict as soon as possible. Aiken's October 1966 speech echoed many of these themes but he had obviously been forming them for some time.

Throughout 1966 Aiken continued to believe that Lyndon Johnson's attempts to end the war in Vietnam remained sincere. Aiken's relationship with Johnson stretched back more than twenty years and the Senator continued to trust Johnson. Aiken continued to allow himself to be beguiled by Johnson's private assurances that he was committed to finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Vietnam. Aiken also believed that the best strategy he could follow involved praising Johnson for any and all peace initiatives

---

<sup>25</sup> Aiken's exchanges with David Bell during his testimony on February 4 demonstrates this. Aiken made it clear that he was in favour of economic assistance to Vietnam and other countries but what disturbed him was the lack of private investment and the existence of corruption in the AID programs. *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966 - Vietnam*, pp. 196-201.

offered by the administration while continuing to argue, forcefully but politely, that enlarging the war was a mistake. As a result, while the Vermont Republican expressed his displeasure with certain administration decisions he did not allow his dissent to become a personal issue with the President. Aiken genuinely sympathized with Johnson and the difficulties that the Texan faced. He seemed to place more of the blame for what he regarded as misguided U.S. decisions concerning Vietnam on Johnson's advisers. Aiken felt that the President was caught in a difficult position. On one side Johnson felt pressure from hawks to increase the intensity of the war while at the same time doves were recommending that Johnson remove U.S. forces from Vietnam as soon as possible. Aiken believed that Johnson was attempting to hold the middle ground, as Aiken seemed to be. As a result, Aiken tempered his criticism of Johnson in the months following the SFRC hearings. Ultimately, Aiken's strategy was a mistake; his measured criticism of Johnson had no effect on the Texan's decision making. As well, the notion that a middle ground position on Vietnam was a viable and achievable position proved illusory. In the months following the hearings, however, Aiken continued to enunciate his middle of the road strategy for limiting the war in Vietnam.

Aiken laid out this position in an interview given two days after the hearings ended.<sup>26</sup> In an appearance on *Face The Nation* Aiken answered a wide-ranging series of questions on the war. Aiken made it clear that he did not believe that the United States could simply remove its troops from Vietnam. Defining the limits of the war remained the most important issue to be settled as far as Aiken was concerned. Referring to his attempts to draw from the Secretary of State a definition of what the limits of American commitment were Aiken said, "No, no, I realized that when I asked that question the other day of Dean Rusk, that it was a question he could not answer, and I got a good big goose egg for my efforts."<sup>27</sup> Aiken was quite critical of Rusk's contention that the terms of the SEATO treaty justified American entry into South Vietnam. He repeated his belief, made numerous times during the hearings, that the United States could not afford, militarily and economically, to overextend itself in confronting Communism.<sup>28</sup>

Aiken wanted the United States government to declare how far it would go in the defense of South Vietnam. Aiken continued to believe that the U.S. had an obligation help the people of South Vietnam, in particular the thousands of refugees brought down from North Vietnam under American supervision in

---

<sup>26</sup> Transcript of CBS-TV *Face The Nation* program, Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24. Aiken said, "I don't think we can undertake to police the whole world. I don't think we can undertake to feed the whole world. I don't think we can undertake to improve the economy of the whole world all at one time."

1954. Aiken also wanted assurances that the war would be confined to South Vietnam. Although he still opposed air attacks, he hoped that the present bombing of North Vietnam be confined only to targets deemed absolutely necessary to stop infiltration. When confronted with the position that this idea had been described as a no-win policy Aiken responded, "Well, anyone can put their own definition on a no-win policy. Maybe if we got out of there with the respect of the world and the whole hide, if I may use a Vermont expression, that would be a win."<sup>29</sup> Aiken recommended employing the enclave strategy expressed by Kennan and Gavin during the SFRC hearings.

Aiken also made it clear during this interview that bombing had done nothing to discourage infiltration of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese forces. Johnson's decision to renew the bombing did not, however, dent Aiken's belief that Johnson was vigorously seeking peace. Aiken felt that the President wanted peace above all else but he did not know how to achieve it. Aiken believed that Russia continued to be the main obstacle to peace; he was satisfied that Johnson would accept peace if the opportunity presented itself. According to Aiken, Johnson was in an unenviable position but he was coping as well as could be expected.<sup>30</sup>

Aiken maintained this position in the ensuing months. Statements made by Johnson regarding American goals in Vietnam increasingly encouraged him.<sup>31</sup> As far as Aiken was concerned he and the President seemed, more and more, to be in agreement concerning Vietnam. Johnson made public statements stressing that the United States did not seek to expand the war any further. Aiken's natural inclination remained to support a President rather than oppose him. He wanted Johnson to succeed as President.<sup>32</sup> For this reason Aiken tempered his criticism of Johnson during this period. In March he said that Johnson "seems to be

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Aiken described Johnson's situation this way; "Well, if you want to divide the people into doves and hawks, you will find they are both pressing on the President. The doves are trying to get him to submit to anything other than fight. The hawks, telling him he ought to go out before breakfast some morning and lick the enemy with one hand tied behind him - these people are pressing on the President and I do have sympathy for him. Because I feel that now, although mistakes have been made by the Executive Branch, he is probably doing about all he can at this time to keep the situation from getting worse. Hoping things will get better." *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Statements made by Johnson such as the one at a February 26, 1966 Press Conference encouraged Aiken. Johnson said, "Now, we will have a long and hard road. It is going to be difficult and it is going to require sacrifices. We want everyone to know that. But we are determined to do what we think ought to be done there. We have told you over and over that our objectives are limited. We want to defeat aggression. We are not trying to seize power and overturn other governments and try to dominate other peoples. We are trying to defeat aggression in South Vietnam. We are trying to defeat social misery. We are trying to establish a stable democratic government, and we are searching for an honourable and just peace." Johnson ed., p. 419.

<sup>32</sup> In a 1968 interview Aiken said, concerning Johnson, "Before the election in 1964, I went out to British Columbia with him...I told him I was not going to vote for him. I had promised to vote for the Republican candidate. But if he was elected, I wanted him to be the best president we ever had and I'd do all I could to help him be a good president. I think that he has realized I have done all I could. It has been uphill at times to defend some of his acts, and I can't defend all of them, of course. But I make it a point to give him credit everywhere I can; credit for believing that he thought he was going to bring the war in Asia to a quick conclusion." Johnson Library, George Aiken Oral History, October 10, 1968, pp. 29-30.



keeping our military efforts within bounds", a circumstance which had led critical Senators to give him "more support than we did some time ago."<sup>33</sup> Offering the President support seemed to be a much more natural reaction for Aiken and Johnson's apparent desire to limit the conflict in Vietnam offered the Republican the opportunity to do so.

Although colleagues such as Mike Mansfield and Frank Church continued to temper their criticism of Johnson's Vietnam policies, other Senators, most notably William Fulbright, became more strident in their attacks on the administration's handling of the war.<sup>34</sup> Fulbright compared the United States, in what he described as its "current imperial mode", to Nazi Germany.<sup>35</sup> The SFRC chairman also declared that the United States was destroying the very country it was seeking to save with Saigon being transformed into a virtual "American brothel".<sup>36</sup> During this period, Fulbright also began to abandon his longtime belief in executive dominance in foreign affairs, calling for renewed and vigorous participation of Congress in determining the goals of American foreign policy. Other members of the Senate, most notably Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening, echoed Fulbright's strident tone. For the most part, however, Senate dissenters continued to offer their criticism in measured tones. Although more Senators, such as Jacob Javits (R-New York), Joseph Tydings (D-Maryland) and Claiborne Pell began to speak out against the war, the administration could continue to count on the support of the majority of Congress.

In the fall of 1966, a survey by the *Congressional Quarterly* determined that of 313 Senators and Representatives questioned, 84.9 percent favoured either continuing with the existing policy or increasing military pressure.<sup>37</sup> Only 15 percent favoured de-escalation and negotiations as a means of ending the war, in fact, more members of Congress believed that the administration should apply more military pressure on North Vietnam in an attempt to achieve a clear victory on the battlefield. During this period, Johnson became increasingly concerned with more hawkish members of Congress such as John Stennis (D-

<sup>33</sup> "Senate Viet Support Growing, GOP's Aiken says," *The Detroit News*, March 9, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8.

<sup>34</sup> Church continued to believe it necessary to support the administration as much as possible. Church's unqualified support for Johnson's domestic programs led the Idaho Democrat to remain as loyal to the White House as possible given his opposition to the war. Church believed that he had to retain a level of credibility with the administration, his colleagues and the public if he hoped to influence U.S. policy in Vietnam. Church wanted to avoid the fate of someone like Wayne Morse, who he viewed as a radical dissenter whose views were virtually ignored by the White House. Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting The Odds: The Life of Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), p. 222. Mansfield's style of dissent reflected his personality. He preferred to try and influence the White House privately and continued this practice throughout 1966. In this respect, he and Aiken were similar. The two men tried to avoid offering their criticism in histrionic public demonstrations of dissent. Gregory Allen Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation* (East Lansing, 1995), pp. 174-180.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Woods, p. 418.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Gibbons, p. 413. Of those polled, 58.5 percent favoured existing policy, 26.4 percent called for stronger military action while only 15.1 percent favoured de-escalation and negotiations.

Mississippi) and John Sparkman (D-Alabama). As a result, he often acceded to the pressure being placed upon the administration by these powerful Senators to increase the military presence in South Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Johnson gave up on trying to placate congressional doves. Johnson began to turn increasingly to Senators that shared his views on Vietnam such as Gale McGee (D-Wyoming), Fred Harris (D-Oklahoma), Birch Bayh (D-Indiana) and Paul Douglas (D-Illinois).<sup>39</sup> In order to court these Senators, Johnson rewarded them with invitations to White House dinners and promises of federal largesse for their constituents. In contrast, Johnson attempted to punish those Senators that called for an end to hostilities by denying their requests for favours and consideration for federal funds.<sup>40</sup>

Aiken later claimed that he was never the victim of a Johnson vendetta for his views on Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Aiken did not recognize at the time that Johnson had decided to sever ties with those Senators of his Party that had, in his view, abandoned him over Vietnam. The GOP had become a source of support to Johnson as he sought to align himself more closely with those conservatives whose views on Vietnam matched his own.<sup>42</sup> Aiken's standing in the Republican Party may have inoculated him somewhat from Johnson's wrath during this period. Aiken also believed that the Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Vietnam had presented Johnson with the means to resist pressure to expand the war. The presentation of legitimate mainstream opposition to escalating hostilities in Southeast Asia, given a forum by the hearings, had, by Aiken's estimation, given Johnson the strength to maintain the position as it existed in Vietnam.<sup>43</sup> Aiken followed this encouragement by the SFRC with encouragement of his own. Aiken did not agree with those who offered nothing but criticism of the Johnson Administration. He believed that this type of criticism from his domestic foes ran the risk of hardening the President's position and pushing him in dangerous directions. For this reason Aiken wanted to make sure that he complimented

---

<sup>38</sup> Karnow, p. 484. Doves such as Church and McGovern recognized the pressure being placed upon Johnson by these congressional hawks. McGovern believed that Johnson looked upon himself as a moderating force, attempting to restrain the military's desire to increase the military pressure in South Vietnam. Church agreed with this assessment, stressing later that Johnson had been under enormous pressure from hawks and had done his best to find a middle of the road policy pleasing to both doves and hawks. Church ultimately blames Johnson for trying to negotiate a moderate position on an issue that needed decisive presidential leadership to arrive at a solution. Johnson Library, George McGovern Oral History, April 30, 1969, p. 10, and Johnson Library, Frank Church Oral History, May 1, 1969, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson's courting of Douglas indicates how anxious the President was to surround himself with Senators that would support him on Vietnam. The relationship between Johnson and the ardently liberal Douglas had long been one filled with acrimony and distrust. After falling out with so many of his old Senate colleagues over Vietnam, Johnson embraced one of his old enemies. Gibbons, p. 158.

<sup>40</sup> Karnow, p. 484-485.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson Library, George Aiken Oral History, October 10, 1968, pp. 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> Terry Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961-1968* (New York, 1986), p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of United Press International Radio program *From The People*, March 21, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 7, pp. 23-24.

Johnson on decisions and comments that he supported. These efforts were for naught, however, as Johnson increasingly isolated himself from those Senators that criticized the direction of American policy in Vietnam.

Aiken's definition of what constituted escalation seemed to shift somewhat during this period, although on closer examination it remains consistent with what he had been saying since 1964. Aiken did not view the introduction of more troops into Southeast Asia as an escalation because he believed that they were needed to solidify the situation in South Vietnam. He made it clear that he had opposed the initial introduction of troops but he recognized that a commitment had been made to South Vietnam and he was not willing to counsel breaking from that obligation. As long as the forces were being used for this goal, the defense and security of South Vietnam and its people, Aiken was inclined to support moves in this direction.<sup>44</sup> A link existed between this support and Aiken's thoughts on an enclave strategy. The Senator had become more and more convinced that this strategy was an effective means of holding the line in Vietnam. Again, Aiken did not associate this strategy with escalation. He recognized that U.S. forces could still only be considered safe when confined to their bases. If more troops could help to secure larger areas of the country from these bases, Aiken believed increases in troop levels were justified.<sup>45</sup>

Aiken wanted the American people to recognize that the United States had to remain in Vietnam for an extended amount of time in order to create conditions amenable to the creation of a strong and viable South Vietnamese government. Aiken did not believe that such a task would be easy and he stressed the need for a strong, honest and able South Vietnamese leader to emerge to push the country in that direction. Johnson's recent statements to that effect encouraged the Vermonter. Aiken believed that the President had been more candid and had defined American policy much more clearly than had been done in the past.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken said, "When I speak of escalation I mean fighting in a wider territory than we are now. It's going to take more men to make secure South Vietnam itself where we are now, probably we might have 400,000 men there by the end of this year, besides the Navy and assistance from Korea, Australia a little from here and there - you might say up to 500,000 men in all. I don't know if that will be adequate or not, it depends on what happens between now and next year. It's conceivable that it might take more than 400,000 of our troops to hold South Vietnam and make any progress towards securing it for the South Vietnamese people." Many Senators shared Aiken's view that a precipitate withdrawal from South Vietnam was unwise. Secretary of State Rusk sent President Johnson a memo following a February 21, 1966, meeting with Senators Pell, Clifford Case (R-New Jersey), Church and Clark outlining that the four men were not counseling an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops, although they vehemently opposed any increase in American forces. Gibbons, p. 253. In 1967, Church authored a statement entitled "A Plea For Realism" that sought to make it clear that although many Senators were dissatisfied with U.S. policy in Vietnam and wanted the administration to push for a negotiated settlement, they were opposed to a unilateral U.S. withdrawal. Sixteen Senators signed it; Democrats Church, McGovern, Fulbright, Frank Moss (Utah), E.L. Bartlett (Alaska), Lee Metcalf (Montana), Hartke, Quentin N. Burdick (North Dakota), Clark, Young, Robert Kennedy, Morse and Pell, and Republicans Cooper and Mark Hatfield (Oregon). Gibbons, p. 686, and Ashby and Gramer, p. 226.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Transcript of ABC Radio News Program *From The Capital*, March 21, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 9, Folder 7. Aiken said, "Well, I certainly am not in favour of getting involved in a war with Red China at this time. It looked more likely a year ago or a few

During this time he repeatedly criticized American officials for their overly optimistic statements concerning the war. He also made it clear that he felt that Johnson was being pressured from within the administration to expand the war.<sup>47</sup> He applauded Johnson's resistance to calls for the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong harbour.<sup>48</sup> Aiken believed that Johnson desired, above all else, a peaceful settlement and his refusal to increase the bombing represented evidence of that. In fact Aiken believed that Russia remained the main obstacle to peace.

Aiken felt that Russia remained content to have both the United States and China engaged in a war in southeast Asia. The reason for this rested more with Russia's relationship with China than it did with her relationship with the United States. According to Aiken, China would remain preoccupied with Vietnam as long as the U.S. remained in Vietnam. He said that in the previous two years China had "suffered several reverses in the arena of world affairs, thus giving Russia a tremendous boost in her efforts to assume undisputed leadership of the Communist World," therefore "it would appear that Russia does not want us to get out of the Vietnam conflict - at least until a time which will be more propitious for her own ambitions."<sup>49</sup> The reluctance of Russia to actively participate in a meaningful peace process meant that the United States had to realize that they were in Vietnam for an extended period. Aiken compared the situation to the fifty-year commitment the United States had made in the Philippines.

Aiken continued to support any calls for peace negotiations, especially those made by Mansfield.<sup>50</sup> Again, Aiken believed that he and Johnson were in agreement on this issue. The Vermont Republican continued to praise the President's statement that he would negotiate with anyone at anytime. In a speech given at the end of April, Aiken counseled Johnson to continue on what he believed to be the President's present course in Vietnam. He said that bombing should not be expanded and probably scaled back but he

---

months ago, than it does today, however, because the President has since set forth our policy in more understandable language, and incorporated in that policy is this statement that we are not going to expand the theatre of the war, the area of the war. We are going to confine our bombing of North Vietnam to supply bases and access routes to South Vietnam and that we are willing to talk with anybody, anytime regarding a settlement of the situation in southeast Asia."

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. Aiken said that he felt that the State Department was more responsible for this pressure than the Defense Department. He described Rusk as being more of a hawk than McNamara.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. On the *Today Show*, Aiken said that "the President has announced that we are confining our bombing to military depots, supply centers, and access routes leading to South Vietnam. And so long as we do that, we're probably not encouraging escalation of the war. But if they get too close to Hanoi or if we make a mistake and go beyond Hanoi into other countries - I mean China - then the risk is very great." Transcript of the *Today Show*, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 4, Folder 21, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Transcript of speech to the Vietnam & Southeast Asia Conference, Montpelier, Vermont, April 23, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 48, box 9, Folder 7, p. 19

<sup>50</sup> "Mansfield Proposes Peace Talks: Rusk Says U.S. To Back Vietnam Election Result," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8. Aiken said "there is no reason why a conference should not be called by others in Asia. We should not have to wait any longer on Russia to do what she should have done months ago."

also said that withdrawing American troops would create a power vacuum in southeast Asia. Furthermore, such a policy ran the risk of allowing China to dominate the region. He stated that the U.S. should hold the bases that they had in South Vietnam and use them to promote economic, social and political programs while at the same time making clear to the world that the American government earnestly wished to create peace in the area.<sup>51</sup> Although he recognized that negotiations, even under UN supervision, had a slim chance for success, he continued to believe that they were the best option available to the U.S.<sup>52</sup>

George Aiken had been correct in assuming that pressure within the administration had been building towards increasing the level and scope of the bombing campaign. Ground forces operations had been stepped up in South Vietnam during the first half of 1966 and the military was anxious to have new bombing strikes accompany them. McNamara and other aides recommended that the strikes be initiated. Johnson did resist the idea of expanding the target list of air strikes but his reasons revolved around the fact that widespread political unrest had been occurring in South Vietnam. When the Buddhist uprising reached its final stages in June of 1966, the White House undertook plans to initiate a bombing campaign against the petroleum supplies of North Vietnam. This involved air strikes against storage and distribution facilities in large cities and the ports where foreign oil was received.<sup>53</sup> The President was convinced of the need for the strikes. On June 22, Johnson had a meeting with thirty Democratic and Republican members of Congress to inform them of his decision to expand the air war. Only Aiken and Mansfield disagreed with the President's emphatic call for a more aggressive bombing policy.<sup>54</sup> The attacks were launched on June 29, 1966.

This decision came as a bitter disappointment for Aiken. After all of his conciliatory language towards Johnson and his efforts at encouraging the President to resist increasing military pressure, Aiken felt betrayed. He had believed that the White House would not escalate the war in this manner. Aiken's comments following the announcement of the bombings revealed how upset he felt. In language that was

---

<sup>51</sup> April 23, 1966, speech to the Vietnam & Southeast Asia Conference, pp. 30-33.

<sup>52</sup> In an interview, Aiken, in response to a question on the Vietcong's plans, said that "they could withdraw - stop infiltration into the south and, if they become less intensified in their fighting, there is a strong possibility that we would also ease up and in the course of time we might say that the war had come to a reasonable conclusion without any formal conclusion." This can be viewed as a foreshadow of what Aiken would recommend in the Fall. *From The People* interview, March 21, 1966.

<sup>53</sup> Gibbons, p. 361, pp. 368-375.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

uncharacteristic for him and in a voice described by *The New York Times* as shaking with emotion Aiken said:

President Johnson is apparently taking the advice of the same people who assured him 18 months ago that a few days of bombing of North Vietnam would bring the enemy to its knees and the conference table. They were wrong then. Now, McNamara uses the greatly increased infiltration as an excuse for intensifying the war. The President has made a mistake. Instead of lessening the war, it will expand it, and it won't shorten it. I think some of the people advising the President want to get China into the war one way or another. I've believed from the beginning that their ultimate aim was to get into an ultimate war.<sup>55</sup>

For Aiken, the war had once again become one in danger of expanding into a nuclear confrontation. Aiken's belief that the administration was working to contain the conflict was shattered. His confidence in Lyndon Johnson had taken a severe blow. The steady erosion of confidence led Aiken, within a few months, to begin speculating that perhaps Johnson should be replaced as President.<sup>56</sup>

Similar minded Senators reacted in much the same manner as Aiken. Mansfield expressed his displeasure with the decision. William Fulbright called the bombing "one more step toward the ultimate war."<sup>57</sup> Robert Kennedy and Jacob Javits also stated their opposition to the air strikes. Senator's Russell, Saltonstall and Symington all agreed with the expanded bombing campaign and they were equally firm in expressing their support. The following day Aiken said that "the President made a mistake...a big mistake."<sup>58</sup> The Vermonter repeated his fear that the United States was taking the world to the brink of nuclear war.

At the end of July Aiken reacted with astonishment at the proposal put forth by South Vietnamese President Nguyen Cao Ky to invade North Vietnam. The proposal met with resistance from both hawks and doves. Mansfield termed it an "abomination" while Saltonstall stressed the need for the United States to stick to its policy of helping South Vietnam achieve stability.<sup>59</sup> Aiken sarcastically referred to Ky as a "great new leader for the Western democracies", saying further that he didn't know "whether to swell with

---

<sup>55</sup> *The New York Times*, June 30, 1966, sect. 1, p. 14, col. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Aiken remained on good terms with the President during this period as evidenced by the surprise birthday party given for Aiken aboard Air Force One on August 20, 1966. The President joined in singing Happy Birthday for the Senator with other guests and served Aiken an improvised birthday cake, a candle in the middle of a large breakfast roll. *The New York Times*, August 21, 1966, sect. 1, p. 59, col. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Gibbons, p. 377.

<sup>58</sup> "Step Toward Nuclear War, Says Aiken," *Burlington Free Press*, July 1, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8. Aiken once again blasted McNamara for his role in the decision. He said, "I'm damned mad at McNamara because he has said the raids are necessary because of increased infiltration from the north. That was the story we got the last time - and it was dead wrong. The trouble with these birds in the Defense Department is that they may know military matters, but they don't know anything about people. McNamara hasn't been right in one of his predictions since he's been in office." Obviously, the conciliatory remarks that Aiken made concerning McNamara earlier in the year had been overshadowed by the Defense Secretary's role in the bombing strikes.

<sup>59</sup> *The New York Times*, July 27, 1966, sect. 1, p. 3, cols. 3-6.

pride or tremble with apprehension."<sup>60</sup> Aiken's bitter reaction to Ky's proposal demonstrated once again that he had become increasingly fed up with the direction the war was taking. The fact that Johnson had disavowed his earlier statements of not expanding the war caused Aiken to fear that the administration just might take the South Vietnamese leader's idea seriously.

Ironically, during this period when Aiken's disenchantment and lack of trust of the administration grew, the U.S. government put added emphasis on trying to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict. In the Fall of 1966 McNamara became increasingly convinced that a military solution was becoming a less likely possibility. American forces continued to be strengthened as the year progressed but McNamara had commissioned a study that revealed that the increased bombing attacks had little effect on the North's ability to wage a war.<sup>61</sup> The administration explored numerous diplomatic possibilities including an Asian peace conference but none of them provided any substantial proposals. The U.S. also explored the possibility of holding direct talks between the South Vietnamese Government and the Vietcong but this too went nowhere. McNamara and his aides made it clear to Westmoreland that the Government had become increasingly wary of escalating the military situation any further. The focus shifted to placing greater emphasis on efforts at pacification and political development.<sup>62</sup> In late September, the White House announced that a conference would be held in Manila on October 23-25. Johnson was scheduled to meet with the leaders of South Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. The group would engage in "a review of military and nonmilitary developments, a review of progress being made toward pacification and revolutionary development, and a review of peace proposals and of new measures for ending the war."<sup>63</sup> It was on the eve of this conference that Aiken gave his most famous speech of the Vietnam era.

Aiken had said in the weeks leading up to the conference that he didn't expect great benefits from the meeting. He did, however, feel that it was important for the President to make the trip, saying that "this trip will be good for him and good for the country."<sup>64</sup> In the same interview Aiken also reacted negatively to

<sup>60</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 17039. Aiken went on to say that "It is very possible that after he takes care of Russia and China and North Vietnam, perhaps we could ask his advice as to what we should do in the United States....Perhaps he could give us advice about the financing of our own Government, which I understand today is in a rather precarious situation."

<sup>61</sup> Gibbons, pp. 382-383. On December 31, 1965, the United States had a total of 184,300 military personnel in Vietnam. On June 30, 1966 that total had reached 267,500. By December 31, 1966 it was 385,300. Richard Dean Burns and Milton Leitenberg, *The Wars In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, 1945-1982*, p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> Gibbons, pp. 387-410.

<sup>63</sup> Gibbons, pp. 440-441.

<sup>64</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, October 10, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 28, Folder 8.

former President Eisenhower's comment that he would use any means to achieve victory in Vietnam. Aiken stressed that Eisenhower had managed to end the Korean War without resorting to using nuclear weapons. For the first time Aiken also voiced his opinion that perhaps Lyndon Johnson had to be replaced as President. He said that "it took a change of administration to stop the Korean War and that might be what will happen in Vietnam. I doubt very much if Hanoi will ever sit down at a peace conference with the present administration."<sup>65</sup> With all of these things in mind, Aiken felt it was an appropriate time for him to make a concrete proposal for ending the hostilities in Vietnam.

Aiken rose in the Senate on October 19, 1966, to give a speech entitled *Vietnam Analysis - Present and Future*.<sup>66</sup> Aiken began the speech by reiterating his support for Johnson's attempts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and his belief that the President was sincere in his desire to do so. Aiken then traced the history of the U.S. commitment back to February 1965. Aiken stressed that the introduction of U.S. troops for the defense of DaNang had been in reaction to the prospect of military defeat of the forces already stationed in Vietnam and not the outside aggression of North Vietnam. Aiken felt it was important to draw this distinction. The American Government had committed itself to an expansion of its forces in order to protect the integrity and credibility of U.S. Armed Forces by avoiding their defeat. As a result, the idea that the initial introduction of U.S. combat troops to Vietnam had been done in order to defend against foreign aggression was false.

Aiken moved to the situation as it existed in October 1966. He said that the U.S. military no longer faced the danger of military defeat. Although American troops would be subjected to increasing casualties as its numbers were augmented, the enemy had returned to guerrilla tactics in order to avoid major formal combat with superior U.S. forces. The credibility and integrity of U.S. Armed Forces faced danger only if the war expanded to include China or if the U.S. presence precipitated the destruction of South Vietnamese society. Aiken claimed that the South Vietnamese government would be less and less capable of asserting its own authority as long as the number of U.S. forces increased. The size of that U.S. commitment was suffocating the possibility of self-determination in South Vietnam because the country's entire defense

---

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Regarding the timing of the speech, Aiken said in an interview two years later that he "had thought of making it for some time. But when the President left for the meeting at Manila with the allied countries over there, the SEATO nations, I thought it was about time to make that suggestion. I think it would have worked; there would have been some grumbling on the part of North Vietnam and possibly Communist China that we really hadn't won the war, but the world as a whole would have accepted it." Johnson Library, George Aiken Oral History, October 10, 1968, p. 18.



rested on the U.S. armed presence. Aiken outlined the fact that the U.S. Government had frequently and emphatically claimed that it was not seeking the destruction of the North Vietnamese state. As a result a clear-cut military objective did not exist for the U.S. military forces in Vietnam.

Aiken proceeded to outline what he considered to be the dangers and alternatives available to the United States. He said:

Considering the fact that as every day goes by, the integrity and invincibility of the U.S. Armed Forces is further placed in question because there is no military objective, the United States faces only two choices: Either we can attempt to escape our predicament by escalating the war into a new dimension, where a new so-called aggressor is brought into play or we can de-escalate the war on the ground that the clear and present danger of a military defeat no longer exists and therefore de-escalation is necessary in order to avoid any danger of placing U.S. Armed Forces in a position of compromise.

Faced with these alternatives, the United States could well declare unilaterally that this stage of the Vietnam war is over - that we have "won" in the sense that our Armed Forces are in control of most of the field and no potential enemy is in a position to establish its authority over South Vietnam.

Such a declaration should be accompanied, not by an announcement of a phased withdrawal, but by the gradual redeployment of U.S. military forces around strategic centers and the substitution of intensive reconnaissance for bombing.

This unilateral declaration of military victory would herald the resumption of political warfare as the dominant theme in Vietnam.

Until such a declaration is made, there is no real prospect for political negotiations.<sup>67</sup>

Aiken said that nobody in the United States, Europe or Russia was likely to challenge a statement that the United States had "won" the war because it would be a direct challenge against the U.S. Armed Forces. If such a challenge were issued, the burden of suggesting a wider war would accrue to the challenger. If the enemy persisted in fighting, it would be seen as the aggressor. As a result, the United States would shed the tag, applied to it by most of the world, that it was the aggressor in the war. This would allow the United States to assume a position of strength in its political position regarding negotiations. Aiken said that "this suggested strategy is not designed to solve the political problem of Vietnam. It is simply designed to remove the credibility of U.S. military power - or more loosely the question of "face" - as the factor which precludes a political solution."<sup>68</sup> Aiken ended by stressing that the United States would have to remain in South Vietnam for many years in order to establish stability in the country. Aiken believed the plan was a feasible course of action and he hoped that it would not be lightly dismissed.

Unfortunately for Aiken, some commentators did in fact dismiss it. The *Chicago Tribune* followed his

---

<sup>67</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 27523.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27524.

speech with an editorial entitled "The Higher Realms of Fantasy", while *The New York Times* wrote that "Senator Aiken could hardly have been serious in his suggestion that the United States declare it has won the war in Vietnam and on the basis of that declaration proceed to rein in its forces."<sup>69</sup> Many of these commentators took Aiken's suggestion that the war be declared 'won' in isolation. Some press reports of the speech placed the emphasis on this aspect.<sup>70</sup> They ignored the fact that Aiken did not simply want the United States to declare victory and get out. He envisioned a long-term commitment of U.S. forces. In fact, as Mark Stoler and others have pointed out, the ideas espoused by Aiken were not completely original.<sup>71</sup> He had essentially endorsed the Gavin plan with the addition that American aims in Vietnam be redefined following a declaration of 'victory'. A victory statement could allow Lyndon Johnson to embark on a strategy of achieving limited results through negotiations, allowing the United States to preserve its credibility with the rest of the world.<sup>72</sup>

Although some ridiculed the idea, the speech drew widespread coverage, much of it positive. Mansfield and Fulbright immediately said that the speech deserved attention and welcomed it as a novel approach to finding a solution to the problem of establishing peace in the region. In later years the speech was misinterpreted and Aiken was remembered for supposedly suggesting that the U.S. declare victory and withdraw from Vietnam.<sup>73</sup> Lyndon Johnson never commented publicly on the speech. Aiken said later that his speech had upset Johnson and that it was "the only time he ever really got mad at me" and that he "didn't get invited to the White House I guess for a couple of months after that event."<sup>74</sup> The year after the

<sup>69</sup> "The Higher Realms of Fantasy," *The Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 1966 and "Victory in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, October 20, 1966. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 5, Folder 18. The *Times* at least treated the proposal to a serious examination. The *Tribune's* editorial sarcastically read, "Sen. George D. Aiken of Vermont has come up with a plan for disposing of the vexing war in Vietnam which is of blinding simplicity. Mr. Aiken does not suggest that we win the war, that we pull out of it, or that we merely mark time. He says that what we should do is proclaim that we have won a military victory. The befuddled Communists, having had notice thus served on them that they have lost, would presumably go into a funk. Why bother to continue fighting when their press clippings demonstrate that they have been defeated? Should our patrols run across them, our boys would not pull the trigger or respond to a challenge to get on with the war. They would merely ask, 'what war'."

<sup>70</sup> The titles of various articles denote this emphasis. "Aiken Suggests U.S. Declare Itself Winner in Vietnam War," *Burlington Free Press*. "Declare War Won", Aiken Urges U.S., *Boston Globe*, "Aiken Asks Johnson To Proclaim Viet War Won," *Chicago Tribune*, were some of the press reports on this speech. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 5, Folder 18.

<sup>71</sup> Senator Frank Lausche said in an exchange with Aiken following the speech that in substance the idea was essentially the Gavin plan. Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 27525.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Stoler, "What Did He Really Say? The 'Aiken formula' For Vietnam Revisited," *Vermont History*, Spring 1978, Volume 46, Number 2, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> Charles F. O'Brien, "Aiken and Vietnam: A Dialogue With Vermont Voters," *Vermont History*, 1993, Volume 61, Number 1, pp. 5-6. O'Brien wrote about Aiken, "He is remembered, inaccurately, for proposing that the United States declare a victory for itself in Vietnam and then withdraw. In *Fire In The Lake*, Frances Fitzgerald wrote that Aiken 'suggested that the United States government simply announce that it had won the war and then withdraw its troops.' For her, this proposal was a 'plausible alternative of ignoring reality altogether.' Aiken's remarks on October 19, 1966, have become part of American folklore. George Will proposed a few years ago an 'Aiken solution' to the budget deficit- declare we have overcome our deficit problems and move on. In 1985, Bill Mauldin published a volume of cartoons under the title, *Let's Declare Ourselves Winners...and Get the Hell Out.*"

<sup>74</sup> Gibbons, p. 449, and Morrissey and Sanford, p. 186.

speech, however, Johnson was asked about it by Leonard Marks, the director of the U.S. Information Agency and a close friend and supporter of the President as well as one of his personal lawyers. Marks later talked about the encounter in an interview. He said,

I was with the President in the morning in his bedroom. He would have these periods when he would sit there and he would read and hand you stuff, and there would be isolated conversations. He really wanted somebody around, and if you had any business you would try to work it in. So at an appropriate interval I said, "I want to talk to you, Mr. President, about the Vietnam situation. I know you don't approve of George Aiken's proposal, but I think we can adapt it. We can say, 'Now that the elections have been held in Vietnam, that they have elected a national and regional and a local government and in a democratic fashion, we have achieved our objectives. We can now withdraw our troop support and continue our military support: arms and money.'" After I had made that statement I waited, and he just glared at me. He had an ability just to look you down so that you got impatient and you become nervous. Finally I said, "Well what do you think?" He said, "Get out." Now, we had known each other since 1948, and I never had a run-in with him, I had never had a cross word. We had differences of opinion, but our relationship I think was as admirable as any relationship I have ever enjoyed. So I picked up my papers and left.

For several weeks I knew that I was in the doghouse. I was not invited to National Security Council meetings, which I had always attended. I wasn't told about Cabinet meetings, which I had regularly attended. I wasn't invited over to the White House family quarters for little informal get-togethers. Finally one afternoon Lady Bird called and said they were having a little surprise party for Lyndon and would my wife and I be available to go. So I did, and he was as warm and effusive as if nothing had ever happened. The incident was never discussed.

After he left the White House, I spent a weekend at the ranch. The two of us [were] together in the living room; there was nobody else around. And again he was sitting there reading and handing me papers and musing. I said, "I want to ask you something." I recalled this incident where he had gotten angry with me, and I said, "I don't understand why you got so mad." He looked at me and he said, "Because in my gut I knew that you and George Aiken were right, and I couldn't do anything about it."<sup>5</sup>

The speech was similar, in one respect, to other suggestions that Aiken made concerning Vietnam during this time: it was ignored by Lyndon Johnson. Aiken became increasingly frustrated by this fact. He had great admiration and respect for the President but the fact that he, along with those Senate colleagues who shared his feelings on the war, were ignored by the White House embittered the Vermonter. By the Summer of 1967, Aiken would become completely exasperated with Johnson. For the rest of 1966 Aiken spoke out very little on the war. He was willing to allow Johnson time to consider the ideas that he had proposed. Aiken had tried to encourage Johnson, gently for the most part, to resist expanding the war. He had trusted Johnson and believed that the President was working hard to achieve peace. Cracks began to appear in that trust during 1966. By the end of 1967, Aiken no longer believed that Johnson was capable of extricating the United States from the war in Vietnam, a war he believed was a terrible mistake.

---

<sup>5</sup> Johnson Library, Leonard H. Marks Oral History, January 26, 1976, p. 22.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *AN IRREVOCABLE SPLIT WITH LBJ*

In 1967, George Aiken became completely disillusioned with Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policies. Aiken had continued to believe that Johnson remained committed to achieving a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Southeast Asia but this belief dissipated during 1967. Aiken had, up until this time, criticized Johnson in a civil and non-partisan manner but this too changed. Aiken's dissent became increasingly bitter as the White House continued to enlarge the American presence in South Vietnam. Aiken was not alone in this respect; by 1967 the Senate had become a cauldron of dissent with more and more of his colleagues clashing with the administration over its conduct of the war. In this respect, 1967 represented a turning point for the United States Senate as its members strove to reassert its role in foreign affairs after years of slowly abdicating its power to the executive branch. George Aiken joined his colleagues in this battle to resurrect the legislative role in American foreign policy.

The Republican Party also endured a Vietnam related upheaval in 1967. The party, led principally by Everett Dirksen in the Senate and Gerald Ford in the House, had managed to quell the divisions that existed in the party regarding U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. Dirksen had steadfastly supported Lyndon Johnson's administration by continuing to maintain the bipartisan approach to foreign policy that had existed, almost unchallenged, in the United States since the end of the Second World War. In the Senate, until 1967, few Republicans joined George Aiken in his dissent. Only John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky and Mark Hatfield of Oregon had protested openly against American involvement in the war in the preceding years. In 1967 Republicans Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, Clifford Case of New Jersey, Jacob Javits of New York and Charles Percy of Illinois joined these three Senators in voicing their opposition to the war in Vietnam. The May 1, 1967, release of a Republican Policy Committee study of the war and the ensuing furor that greeted its tabling highlighted the growing divisions within the ranks of the Senate GOP. Aiken had been isolated within the Republican Party as far as the issue of Vietnam

had been concerned; finally in 1967 his attempts to convince more Republicans to oppose the war had proven successful.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee continued to serve as the main focus of Senate dissent. Its chairman, William Fulbright, widely recognized as the leading political dissenter in the United States, continued to apply pressure on the Johnson administration. In an attempt to reign in what many on the SFRC believed to be an over extension of American resources around the world, the committee held hearings on the issue of United States national commitments. The SFRC also held hearings on Senator Mansfield's resolution to take the matter of Vietnam to the United Nations Security Council in the fall of 1967. As a member of the committee, Aiken was in close contact, to varying degrees, with those members of the SFRC who shifted from support of administration policies to open dissent during 1967. As a result, Aiken was able to influence and be influenced by a number of Senators who held similar views on the war, a situation that helped to reinforce his beliefs.

In 1967 the American people became increasingly disenchanted with the progress of the war in Vietnam. It became apparent that Lyndon Johnson's attempt to straddle the middle ground, between hawks on one side and doves on the other, had begun to fail. Although Johnson's overall approval rating had started to fall in 1965, in 1966 and 1967 a significant erosion occurred. In January of 1966 Johnson's approval rating stood at 60%. By December of the same year it had fallen to a low of 45%. In 1967, after a temporary rise during the Spring, it dropped to 39% in August. Even more troublesome for Johnson and his advisers, his handling of the war had fallen to a disastrous 28% approval rating by October of 1967.<sup>1</sup> Both hawks and doves had become dissatisfied with the war's progress. Americans with dovish tendencies wanted the war ended through peace negotiations followed by American withdrawal while hawks wanted the war ended sooner by an increased military campaign, particularly a stepped up bombing attack. Johnson's inability to please either of the two sides became apparent in a White House meeting with Democratic Senators at the beginning of 1967.

---

<sup>1</sup> George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, (New York, 1986), p. 174, and "The President in Trouble," *Newsweek*, September 4, 1967, p. 17.

The meeting, held on January 9, 1967, was attended by twenty-three Democratic Senators, including all of the committee chairman save one, as well as the President and vice-president.<sup>2</sup> Of the Senators attending, only Mike Mansfield and William Fulbright were, at this time, outright opponents of the war. Mansfield had arranged the meeting in order to insure that Senate Democrats and the White House could discuss and deal with a variety of issues prior to Johnson's State of the Union message the following evening. The topic of conversation, however, quickly turned to Vietnam. Fulbright told Johnson that it remained imperative that the administration find a way to extricate the United States from the war in Southeast Asia. He attributed the poor showing of the Democrats in the 1966 mid-term elections to the public's unhappiness with American policy in Vietnam. Mansfield did not speak out against the war, serving instead as the conciliatory link between the Senators and the President. Other Senators, while not opponents of the war, also expressed concern about the direction of the military campaign in Vietnam.

Senator Muskie said that although he agreed with Johnson's moderate position he felt that the war was "difficult for people to understand" and that it was necessary "to clarify who is for what."<sup>3</sup> John Pastore expressed concern over the intensified bombing campaign, indicating that he favoured a pause and hoped that the White House would seek a mediated settlement brokered by UN Secretary-General U Thant. Failing that, however, Pastore recommended that the President "use his Sunday punch" to try to achieve a quick military victory.<sup>4</sup> While Senators such as Russell Long, Jennings Randolph, Daniel Brewster and George Smathers expressed unfailing support for Johnson's policies, others echoed Pastore's calls for greater military action. Richard Russell, Lister Hill and Stuart Symington advocated stepping up the military campaign. Russell said that "we should go in and win, or get out" while Symington stressed the need for more airstrikes with fewer restrictions. Symington also told Johnson, however, that he was "not as optimistic" about the war as some of his colleagues, saying that the war was "costing too much" and

---

<sup>2</sup> William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships: Part II: July 1965 - January 1968*, (Princeton, 1995), p. 547. Senators attending were: Clinton Anderson (New Mexico), Alan Bible (Nevada), Daniel Brewster (Maryland), James Eastland (Mississippi), Allen Ellender (Louisiana), William Fulbright (Arkansas), Philip Hart (Michigan), Carl Hayden (Arizona), Lister Hill (Alabama), Daniel Inouye (Hawaii), Everett Jordan (North Carolina), Russell Long (Louisiana), John McClellan (Arkansas), Warren Magnuson (Washington), Mike Mansfield (Montana), A.S. Mike Monroney (Oklahoma), Edmund Muskie (Maine), John Pastore (Rhode Island), Jennings Randolph (West Virginia), Richard Russell (Georgia), George Smathers (Florida), John Sparkman (Alabama), Stuart Symington (Missouri).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 548.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

hurting the President and the Democratic Party politically.<sup>5</sup> Some of the other men attending the meeting also stressed these political factors, with Alan Bible in particular urging that “some way be found to resolve Vietnam, which he felt was the most important factor in Nevada elections.”<sup>6</sup>

Although criticism of the war remained somewhat muted by these Senators of Johnson’s own political party, the fact that Vietnam constituted the main topic of conversation during the meeting must have sent a disquieting message to the President. Lawrence O’Brien, Postmaster General at the time and former congressional liaison officer, later noted that the meeting revealed that “clearly, in early 1967, the President was not hearing outspoken criticism of the war from Democratic leaders in the Senate”, but that “this meeting, however mild its criticisms, was nonetheless the strongest face-to-face criticism of the war the President had heard. In previous meetings, the war had hardly been discussed at all.”<sup>7</sup> As 1967 progressed, these criticisms became more fervent and widespread.

On January 19, Senator John Stennis (D-Mississippi) became the first of several Senators to publicly call for increased military pressure on Hanoi. Stennis, the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, urged the White House to step up the bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The Johnson administration had come under fire for the deaths of civilians in bombing raids and Stennis urged the White House not to allow the criticism to dissuade the United States from continuing and expanding the air war.<sup>8</sup> Stennis said that “we must not be panicked into making the tragic mistake of letting pressure, either domestic or foreign, or the worldwide propaganda offensive which Hanoi has mounted, force us to halt the bombing”, contending instead that “we should remove the arbitrary restrictions and expand the air war so as to strike all military significant targets. We should knock out their steel mills, concrete plants, and electric power generating plants.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to his calls for an increased air war, Stennis urged the administration to accede to the military’s demands for a substantial increase in the number of American soldiers stationed in South Vietnam.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> In a series of articles written in *The New York Times*, Harrison Salisbury had made it clear that bombs dropped from U.S. warplanes had destroyed many nonmilitary facilities, killing and wounding numerous civilians. “Civilians Weren’t The Target, but...”, *Newsweek*, (January 9, 1967), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times* (January 21, 1967), sect. 1, p. 6, col. 4. Stennis is perhaps referring to the fact that Salisbury admitted that he had been relying on North Vietnamese sources for casualty totals.

Senator Symington made public his calls for increased bombing of North Vietnam at this time. Commenting on a trip that he had taken to Vietnam, Symington lamented the fact that U.S. officials were preventing U.S. pilots from bombing North Vietnamese airfields. The Missouri Democrat claimed that U.S. pilots were subjected to numerous and unreasonable restrictions. He advocated it because, as he said, "the number of troops coming down from the North today is considerably greater than we were told last year would be coming down at this time", he favoured the bombing of more and more military targets in North Vietnam as an attempt to stem the rate of infiltration.<sup>10</sup> Symington declared that he was less optimistic than he had been a year earlier, therefore he felt that "the monetary problems and other problems have increased my desire for a political settlement more so than before, if it can be arranged on a proper basis."<sup>11</sup> Symington's pessimism illustrated the problems that the Johnson administration had placating those members of Congress who, although considered hawks on the war, were becoming increasingly disenchanted with U.S. policy.

In contrast to Stennis and Symington, William Fulbright continued to urge the White House to scale back U.S. military forces and seek a peaceful settlement to the conflict. In a book entitled *The Arrogance of Power*, released January 24, 1967, Fulbright outlined his plans for ending the war in Vietnam. In an eight point program, Fulbright called for an ending to the bombing of North Vietnam, direct talks between Saigon and the Vietcong, cease-fire proposals from the United States and South Vietnam, as well as pledges by the U.S. to remove its troops from Vietnam as soon as possible. These steps would lead to the convening of an international conference to guarantee peace agreements and to plan a referendum on the reunification of North and South Vietnam and the neutralization of Southeast Asia.<sup>12</sup> The plan was clearly unworkable, however, because of Hanoi's unwillingness to agree to end infiltration and cease hostilities in return for a bombing halt. There was a further difficulty in the White House's refusal to endorse a negotiating role for the Vietcong. Despite these flaws, the book was a bestseller. It became one of the most

---

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 551.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Symington reported on his trip to the Armed Services Committee, the report was made public in late March. In it Symington claimed that U.S. pilots had told him that they believed that it was necessary to bomb MIG airfields in and around Hanoi in order to prevent North Vietnamese pilots from harassing U.S. jets. Symington's report contended that U.S. military commanders had recommended that the bases be bombed but the White House had refused to authorize the attacks. *The New York Times* (March 27, 1967), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 8 and p. 12, cols. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York, 1966), pp. 188-197.



widely known works of the time, selling over 400,000 copies. It cemented Fulbright's reputation as the most articulate and influential dove in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

On January 16, 1967, Fulbright had announced plans to hold Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on the responsibilities of the United States as a great power. The hearings, styled as an educational seminar for the American people, were scheduled to call as witnesses Dean Rusk, George Kennan, Edwin Reischauer, Henry Steele Commager and General James Gavin. Fulbright said that Rusk was being called to testify as the first witness on January 24.<sup>14</sup> On January 18, Johnson held a White House meeting with Fulbright, Mansfield, Everett Dirksen, Bourke Hickenlooper, Richard Russell and George Aiken in an attempt to have the hearings delayed.<sup>15</sup> These attempts were only marginally successful, as the hearings were only delayed until January 30, although Rusk never appeared before the Committee in public session during this set of discussions.

The White House reacted to these hearings and the continued grumbling of various members of Congress by holding a series of briefings on foreign affairs and Vietnam in particular during January and February. Every member of Congress was invited to attend a briefing, a series of eight were held. Aiken attended the January 19 briefing along with many of his Senate colleagues.<sup>16</sup> At this meeting, Fulbright, disillusioned with these attempts to cajole Senators into continuing to support administration policy, allegedly said to Joseph Clark (D-Pennsylvania), "Joe, I'm tired of listening to these prejudices and propaganda...let's get out of here."<sup>17</sup> Fulbright's reaction, albeit an isolated incident, displayed the unrest that continued to build in the Congress.

Prior to 1967, the Republican Party had been remarkably united in its stand on Vietnam. Very few Republicans advocated a U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, leaving George Aiken as a lonely Republican voice calling for de-escalation. Most members of the party followed the pattern established by Everett

---

<sup>13</sup> Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York, 1995), p. 442. Barry Goldwater reacted angrily to Fulbright's peace plan. Goldwater called the plan "foolishness", saying further that "I was shocked to see the chairman of our foreign policy committee talk about ending the war with negotiations. Anyone who's been there recently knows there's no chance of that. We're not far enough along the military road in that war to bring the enemy to the conference table. Also, I was frightened to see the chairman objecting to the President's policy in the war - a policy which I think all of us can agree with for the most part, if not entirely." Goldwater's speech, given before an Air Force Association gathering, drew bursts of applause from those gathered. Goldwater also said to reporters following the speech that restrictions on U.S. bombing attacks should be lifted. *The New York Times* (January 24, 1967), sect. 1, p. 3, cols. 6-8.

<sup>14</sup> *The New York Times* (January 17, 1967), sect. 1, p. 3, cols. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Daily Diary of President Johnson (1963-1969), Johnson Library, Reel 8, January 18, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, January 19, 1967.

<sup>17</sup> Gibbons, p. 553.

Dirksen, the Senate Minority Leader, in exhibiting firm support for Lyndon Johnson's policies in Vietnam. Dirksen steadfastly supported the President, constantly stressing the need to cling to the post-war bipartisan consensus on foreign policy. By 1967, however, Dirksen sought to make clear that although the Republican Party continued to support a strong military policy in Vietnam, he and others in the party disagreed with many of the tactics being used in Southeast Asia. In response to Johnson's State of the Union address, Dirksen directed some pointed criticism at the President. The Illinois Senator asked the White House to define the policy of the U.S. government regarding a peace settlement in Vietnam and whom the United States was ready to negotiate with to determine such a settlement. Dirksen wanted to know "what policy will we (The Republican Party) be asked to support?"<sup>18</sup> Dirksen wanted to demonstrate that the Republican Party, while disagreeing with some of the administration's tactics, remained the patriotic and loyal opposition, determined to show a unified front in foreign policy. Others in the GOP, however, were coming to the same conclusion that Aiken had reached, namely that it was imperative that the United States extricate itself from the war in Vietnam.

On February 12, 1967, in a Lincoln's Birthday speech in Buffalo, New York, Jacob Javits (R-New York) declared his opposition to the war in Vietnam. Javits had initially supported the war but, as he later wrote, he began to have doubts about the conflict during the Summer of 1966 when the United States expanded the air war and sent more and more troops to Southeast Asia. Javits became more convinced that the war was a mistake in December of 1966 when the White House authorized the bombing of a previously off limits area of central Hanoi thereby sabotaging what he believed was a legitimate opportunity for peace.<sup>19</sup> As far as Javits was concerned, a chance had existed to end the war on terms that would have allowed some self-determination and self-government for South Vietnam, ideals that Javits believed the United States was fighting to achieve. Javits felt that Lyndon Johnson had personalized the war, allowing these goals to be diverted by his determination to deal a crippling blow to worldwide

---

<sup>18</sup> Terry Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961-1968* (New York, 1986), p.114. Regarding Republican support for the war Dirksen said, "Let us make plain to the world that we mean business! We are in this war to carry out our commitments. To do less would be to break our pledge. In this grim undertaking, a teaspoonful of gospel is not enough. We must do all that is necessary until the freedom and independence of Vietnam are assured."

<sup>19</sup> Senator Jacob K. Javits with Rafael Steinberg, *Javits: The Autobiography of a Public Man* (Boston, 1981), p. 398.

Communism by defeating Hanoi's forces decisively in South Vietnam. Javits said that Johnson "has become locked into the mistakes, illusions and overoptimistic predictions of his own policies. He is so busy defending himself, making excuses, and changing facts and figures that he appears to many to have lost the initiative and credibility to make peace on his own....President Johnson made the mistakes and he feels he has to defend them. He may be defending them at the price of extending the conflict. The Republican Party is not bound by his mistakes or policies."<sup>20</sup>

Senate critics were given the opportunity to air their grievances during debate over the President's request for supplemental funds for the remainder of fiscal year 1967. In his Budget message for fiscal year 1968, Johnson had asked for a \$12.3 billion supplemental request to cover costs incurred by the war during fiscal 1967, as well as \$21.9 billion for fiscal year 1968.<sup>21</sup> Debate on the request began on February 23, 1967. Almost immediately after it began, Senator Joseph Clark offered an amendment, cosponsored by Wayne Morse, entitled a "Statement of Congressional Policy."<sup>22</sup> Clark's amendment was merely a "sense of Congress" resolution, meaning that it was not binding on the executive branch. Nevertheless, it met with fierce opposition. Many Senators found its terms, that the Congress declare its desire that none of the funds included in the appropriation be used to fund military action over North Vietnam or that an increase in troops over 500,000 be accompanied by a declaration of war by Congress, politically unacceptable.<sup>23</sup> Richard Russell, serving as floor manager of the appropriations bill, and William Fulbright engaged in an extended debate on the floor of the Senate.

The two men sparred over the wisdom of adopting the Clark amendment with Russell declaring his firm opposition. He stated that a declaration of war was unnecessary and could very well expand the war by inducing China or the Soviet Union to come to the aid of North Vietnam under the terms of a treaty unknown to the United States. Under pressure from Fulbright, Russell claimed that the Johnson administration had the authority to commit as many as a million troops to Vietnam if they were needed. The Georgia Senator went on to say that the U.S. could not achieve peace by reducing the escalation of the

---

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Gibbons, p. 585-6.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 587.

<sup>23</sup>*The New York Times* (March 1, 1967), sect. 1, p. 3, col. 5.

war but rather "by stepping up the bombing."<sup>24</sup> Other Senators such as John Sherman Cooper, Strom Thurmond (R-South Carolina) and Ernest F. Hollings (D-South Carolina) joined Russell in expressing opposition to the Clark amendment. In response to such fierce opposition, Clark, realizing that the amendment stood no chance of passage, offered a second amendment which eliminated the calls for a declaration of war and the opposition to the use of the money for military action over North Vietnam. The second amendment stressed the support of Congress for American troops in Vietnam, the support for any and all attempts to find a peaceful settlement to the war as well as firm support for the "Geneva Conference Agreement of 1954 and the Final Declaration of that Conference as a basis for the settlement of the Vietnam War."<sup>25</sup> Although not as vociferous as the opposition to the first amendment, the second Clark resolution was met with great resistance in the Senate.

On February 28, Mike Mansfield offered a slightly revised version of Clark's second amendment. The Mansfield amendment outlined the support of Congress for U.S. troops and any and all attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully while offering Congressional endorsement of the convening of a peace conference in order to formulate plans for bringing the war to an honourable end.<sup>26</sup> The key difference between this amendment and Clark's second amendment rested with the fact that Mansfield's did not specify that the 1954 Geneva Conference Final Declaration should serve as a basis for the settlement of the war. In a discussion with Russell, Mansfield made it clear that the amendment was not meant as a limitation on the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. Mansfield had worried that defeat of the Clark amendment, which had been likely, could have been interpreted as approval for an open-ended authorization of force.<sup>27</sup> Mansfield said that "the question of how we became involved is moot. The question now is, 'How can this war be terminated at the soonest possible time in an honourable peace for all concerned?'" In voting for the

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Gibbons, p. 588.

<sup>26</sup> Gibbons, p. 589. Mansfield's amendment read:  
The Congress hereby declares-

- (1) its firm intentions to provide all necessary support for members of the Armed Forces of the United States fighting in Vietnam;
- (2) its support of efforts being made by the President of the United States and other men of good will throughout the world to prevent an expansion of the war in Vietnam and to bring that conflict to an end through a negotiated settlement which will preserve the honour of the United States, protect the vital interests of this country, and allow the people of South Vietnam to determine the affairs of the nation in their own way;
- (3) its support of the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962 and urges the convening of that Conference or any other meetings of nations similarly involved and interested as soon as possible for the purpose of formulating plans for bringing the conflict to an honourable conclusion in accordance with the principles of those accords.

<sup>27</sup> Gibbons, pp. 589-590.

substitute, the Senate would express only full support for the Americans whose lives are on the line in Vietnam, but it would also lend encouragement to every reasonable effort to find an honourable peace for Southeast Asia."<sup>28</sup>

The Mansfield amendment satisfied both hawks and doves. Hawks interpreted it as a reaffirmation of their goals in Vietnam. The White House could state that the Congress had not impeded their right to wage the war as they saw fit. Opponents of the war could point to the fact that the amendment stressed the need to end the war as soon as possible. Moderates viewed the amendment as a means of voicing their desire to end the war with honour while continuing to express their support for America's fighting men.<sup>29</sup> As a result, on February 28 the amendment passed by a vote of 72-19 with nine conservative Democrats and ten Republicans voting against it.<sup>30</sup> The nineteen men voting against the amendment argued that it was unnecessary and would send the signal to the enemy that the United States was not unified in its support for the war. Events in the ensuing days and months would destroy the notion of unanimity that these men were trying to maintain regarding Congressional support for the conflict.

George Aiken was one of the men who voted for the Mansfield amendment. The day after the amendment was voted on, however, Aiken made it clear, in a Senate speech, that he was dissatisfied with American policy in Vietnam. Aiken once again repeated the idea, first espoused in his October 1966 Senate speech, that the United States declare victory in Vietnam in order to de-emphasize the U.S. military role in the region. Aiken did not envision a scenario wherein U.S. forces would be able to leave South Vietnam in the near future. However, according to Aiken, a fundamental problem faced American policy makers. Aiken said, regarding peace negotiations, that "we are prepared at a moment's notice to enter into negotiations and stand ever alert for an initiative from the other side. But it is unclear what it is we are prepared to negotiate about. What is it that we have not won which we still seek to win? Surely, it is not a military victory beyond that which we already have achieved, for no military objective has ever been stated."<sup>31</sup> The American government had also, by offering to negotiate with little or no consultation

---

<sup>28</sup> *The New York Times* (March 2, 1967), sect. 1, p. 3, col. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Gibbons, p. 590.

<sup>30</sup> Aiken voted for the amendment. Those voted against it were Democrats Byrd (West Virginia), Eastland (Mississippi), Hill (Alabama), Hollings (South Carolina), Long (Alabama), McClellan (Arkansas), Russell (Georgia), Stennis (Mississippi)

<sup>31</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 4870.

with Saigon, left out the South Vietnamese government. According to Aiken, no amount of American military force would correct the problems which existed in South Vietnamese society.

Aiken also believed that it was folly for the American military to be involved in a policy of social reengineering in South Vietnam. Aiken said that U.S. forces should be used only to hold key outposts, thereby allowing for a modicum of stability while South Vietnamese leaders enacted sweeping changes to the country's society. The emphasis on a military solution distracted from the fact that the main problems lay with the government in Saigon. As long as U.S. Armed Forces continued to prop up the South Vietnamese government, Aiken believed that the war would never be won. By making Saigon totally dependent on the U.S. military, the American government was suffocating any and all possibilities that existed for South Vietnamese society to address its problems.<sup>32</sup>

Aiken also stressed that the U.S. strategy of bombing North Vietnam as an attempt to induce Hanoi to come to the negotiating table was also nonsensical since the crux of the problem lay in South Vietnam. Aiken said that "because the problem in Vietnam is one of social engineering, it is folly to look for an escape from our predicament through extending the war to whatever targets or objectives might be conjured up outside South Vietnam."<sup>33</sup> Aiken again suggested replacing bombing with extensive reconnaissance as a means of stifling North Vietnamese infiltration. Aiken concluded his speech by saying, "At present we are in a very real sense our own worst enemy in that country. We have chosen a strategy that ill befits our vast military power. We have persevered with that strategy to the point where we are encouraging even our own people to believe that we face either an unthinkable retreat or a hideous escape into a wider or more terrible war. This is a strategy that denies options; it is a strategy that has failed."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Regarding the future role of American forces as he saw it, Aiken said "We have two divisions in Korea 15 years after the onset of that war. We will have to have more military power than that in or around Vietnam 15 years from now if we are to keep the peace in that part of the world. What we cannot have is either total victory or withdrawal; the two ideas are rooted in the same illusion. Yet we can say that we have won militarily all that is necessary and no power on earth will rise to challenge our word. What would such a declaration mean? It would mean a radical change in strategy - a change from a strategy of trying to reengineer Vietnamese society to one of mounting a strong watch over that society, a watch maintained at strong points on the coast and at the sea. We would be saying to our friends in Saigon that social change must be their job and it is time they got down to it." Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 4871.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4871.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

In his October 1966 speech, Aiken had emphasized the need “to remove the credibility of U.S. military power—or more loosely the question of ‘face’—as the factor which precludes a political solution.”<sup>35</sup> By March of 1967, Aiken had concluded that the problem was more widespread than that. While decrying the fact that the Johnson administration had not heeded his advice but rather had continued to escalate the war, Aiken stated his belief that the words and actions of the White House had led the United States into an unworkable and increasingly dead end policy. Aiken believed that the White House had trapped itself with its rhetoric of defending against communism in Southeast Asia. The administration’s tactic of equating scaling back the military presence in Vietnam with surrender had eliminated de-escalation as a possibility. As a result, an even greater and more destructive war seemed to be the only policy available to President Johnson and his administration. Aiken believed that it was imperative that the United States shift the emphasis of its policy from a military to a political solution. The reengineering of South Vietnamese society was the only means of guaranteeing the long-term viability of South Vietnam as a stable, independent country. That political and social solution, according to Aiken, had to be planned, executed and realized by the South Vietnamese themselves. A continued U.S. military presence was required to achieve this goal, but continued expansion of military operations would serve only to stifle attempts by Saigon to do so. Aiken believed that it was essential that the United States allow Saigon the freedom to achieve its destiny, no matter what the result. Although he did not say it outright in this speech, it was becoming increasingly apparent to Aiken that Lyndon Johnson could no longer accomplish such a result.

The day after Aiken’s address, Robert Kennedy gave a major Senate speech on Vietnam. The New York Senator had spoken out against the administration’s Southeast Asia policy before but never as forcefully. Although men such as Aiken, Mansfield, Morse, Gruening, Church and Fulbright had been speaking against the war for some time prior to Kennedy’s emergence as a strong war critic, none of them, including Fulbright, could attract the national attention that Kennedy could. Kennedy garnered more press attention than anyone in Congress and was second as a national political figure only to

---

<sup>35</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 27523.

President Johnson. As a result, Kennedy's speech was an important milestone in the history of the antiwar movement.

Kennedy was spurred into making the speech following an incident in early February. During a swing through Europe Kennedy had stopped in Paris for meetings with French officials. Kennedy was joined by American Embassy official John Gunther Dean for a meeting with Etienne Manac'h, the French government's director of Far Eastern Affairs. During the meeting, Manac'h relayed an important peace feeler to the two men but Kennedy, not versed in French, later claimed not to have understood that a new and significant peace feeler had been disclosed.<sup>36</sup> Dean relayed the information to the State Department in Washington following the meeting. *Newsweek* reported the existence of the peace feeler and the Kennedy role in its delivery to the American government. Johnson was furious, convinced that Kennedy or his staff had leaked the story to *Newsweek*. The two men met on February 6 to discuss the situation. By all accounts the meeting was extremely tense and the animosity between the two men came to a boil.<sup>37</sup> Kennedy came away from the meeting convinced that Johnson believed the war was going to be over by the summer through a military victory. He later told an aide that Johnson "was very abusive, he was shouting and seemed very unstable. I kept thinking that if he exploded like that with me, how could he ever negotiate with Hanoi."<sup>38</sup> Kennedy had concluded that there was no point in trying "to mute his criticism of the war" any longer, and he began to lay the groundwork for a major address on Vietnam.<sup>39</sup>

On March 2, 1967, Kennedy proposed a three-point program for the settlement of the war. First, the United States should test the sincerity of recent peace overtures offered by Communist leaders, by immediately halting the bombing of North Vietnam, while declaring that the U.S. was prepared to negotiate within the week. Secondly, once negotiations are started both sides should agree to halt any significant increases in the scale of the war by infiltration or reinforcement. An international group would

---

<sup>36</sup> "Peace? - Hints, Signs, Hopes" *Newsweek*, February 13, 1967, p. 34 and Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and his Times* (Boston, 1978), pp. 824-825. The significance of the peace feeler lay in the fact that Hanoi claimed to be willing to begin negotiations after a cessation of the bombing, a change from the previously strict adherence to its insistence that their Four Points of negotiation be respected by the American government.

<sup>37</sup> Many versions of the meeting made their way into print. *Time* magazine reported that Johnson had told Kennedy that his political career would be over quickly while Kennedy had called the President an S.O.B. (*The New York Times*, March 14, 1967, sect. 1, p. 3, col. 3.) *Newsweek* reported that Johnson told Kennedy that "if he and his dovish colleagues persisted in their dissents, 'the blood of American boys will be on your hands'." ("That Man and That Boy" *Newsweek*, March 20, 1967, p. 25) The two sides denied that the meeting became this heated but clearly the enmity between the two had increased.

<sup>38</sup> Schlesinger, p. 827.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 828.



be called upon to patrol borders, ports and roads in order to oversee compliance with this provision. Thirdly, an international military force should gradually replace American troops while political negotiations were taking place to insure that all major political elements in South Vietnam, including the Vietcong, could participate in elections to select a national leadership in order to begin work on South Vietnam's future political course.<sup>40</sup> Kennedy also echoed Aiken's call for social reform in South Vietnam as an important element in any peace settlement. The New York Democrat also made it clear that he believed, as Aiken did, that the United States was in no danger of being defeated militarily by any combination of North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops.<sup>41</sup>

The White House immediately rejected Kennedy's proposals. Dean Rusk made it clear that although the administration was willing to begin negotiations for peace, prior bombing pauses had proven to be ineffective and costly to American war aims.<sup>42</sup> Essentially the Johnson White House was willing to begin negotiations, but only on terms that it had set. As a result, most proposals for peace issued by various Senators were dead before they had even been put forth. Although President Johnson did not comment directly on Kennedy's speech, he engaged in a contest for newspaper attention by conducting a day that "included two speeches, a press conference, a Congressional reception and a headline-grabbing announcement that the Russians had agreed to talk about limiting the missile race."<sup>43</sup> Johnson also arranged to have Senator Jackson (D-Washington) read a letter from the President that defended the bombing as an "integral part of our total plan which aims not to destroy North Vietnam but to force Hanoi to end its aggression so that the people of South Vietnam can determine their own future without coercion."<sup>44</sup> Although Johnson did his best to overshadow Kennedy, the bulk of the next day's headlines were devoted to coverage of the New York Democrat's speech. The extensive coverage was a culmination of Johnson's worst fears. Although numerous Senators had made known their opposition to Johnson's

---

<sup>40</sup> *The New York Times*, March 3, 1967, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 8 and p. 10, col. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, cols. 1 and 5. Regarding the danger of military defeat, Kennedy said, "We need not wait timidly for a certain outcome and sure guarantees. Fearful for our dignity and anxious for our prestige, this enormous country, a nation which commands half the wealth and power of the globe, need not be fearful of North Vietnam. Vietcong guerrillas, even with their northern Allies, will not drive from the battlefield an American army, backed by endless funds and towering resources." As far as social reform was concerned, Kennedy said that "obviously, for a civilian government to be effective, it must engage in far more serious efforts at political and social reform than has any in the past. Indeed, the lack of previous reform is a major reason for our present difficulties."

<sup>42</sup> *The New York Times*, March 3, 1967, sect. 1, p. 10, col. 6.

<sup>43</sup> "Men at War: RFK vs. LBJ" *Newsweek*, March 13, 1967, p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> *The New York Times*, March 3, 1967, sect. 1, p. 10, col. 8.

Vietnam policies, Kennedy was the man who most alarmed the President.<sup>45</sup> The deluge of publicity also revealed that although there existed more eloquent and learned critics of the war in the Senate, Kennedy's active dissent brought the issue more widespread attention than that available to any other Senator.

The reaction in the Senate itself to Kennedy's speech once again revealed the ever-widening chasm of opinion that existed in that body. Democrats Fulbright, Clark, Gore, McGovern, Hartke and Mansfield as well as Republicans Percy and Cooper praised the speech while McGee, Lausche, Jackson and Byrd, all Democrats, expressed skepticism concerning Kennedy's proposals. Aiken was not present in the chamber for Kennedy's speech and did not offer a comment to the press. The following day Everett Dirksen told reporters that Kennedy's proposals contained nothing new and that he stood by the President's policies.<sup>46</sup>

Three weeks after Kennedy's speech, in a further reflection of the volatility of opinion that existed in the Senate, Edward Brooke (R-Massachusetts), revealed in his maiden speech that he was shifting his opinion on the war from opposition to support. The newly elected Senator received a substantial amount of attention as the first black elected to the Senate by popular vote. During his 1966 campaign Brooke had stated that he was troubled by the war and advocated an early end to the conflict through peace negotiations. In March, however, Brooke had embarked on a seventeen nation tour of Southeast Asia. As a result, Brooke had, as he said, come to believe that "the burden of responsibility has shifted from the United States to the Hanoi Government. I firmly believe that this continuation of the war is based upon the influence of those in Hanoi who believe that the United States will falter in its commitment."<sup>47</sup> This statement served as an obvious swipe at those Senators who had expressed opposition to U.S. policy. Although Brooke made it clear that he was opposed to any further expansions of the war, Johnson was very pleased with the speech, described by *Newsweek* as a major home-front victory for the President.<sup>48</sup>

In late March, at a weekly luncheon of Senate Republicans, Jacob Javits suggested that attempts be made to arrive at a general consensus on Vietnam among the 36 Senate Republicans.<sup>49</sup> As a result, staff members of the Senate Republican Policy Committee were instructed to write a history of American

---

<sup>45</sup> Schlesinger, p. 830.

<sup>46</sup> *The New York Times*, March 3, 1967, sect. 1, p. 3, col. 5 and March 4, 1967, sect. 1, p. 10, cols. 1-6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, March 24, 1967, sect. 1, p. 2, col. 6.

<sup>48</sup> "Change of Heart" *Newsweek*, April 3, 1967, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> *The New York Times*, May 2, 1967, sect. 1, p. 12, col. 1.

involvement in Vietnam. The report was intended only for confidential consideration by Republican Senators but was made public on May 1, 1967, by the chairman of the Policy Committee, Bourke Hickenlooper.<sup>50</sup>

The White Paper, entitled *The War In Vietnam*, immediately generated a storm of controversy. The genesis of the uproar lay in the fact that the study amounted to a stinging indictment of the Vietnam policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. It represented a clear and fundamental shift away from the steadfast support that Johnson had received from most of the 36 Senate Republicans.<sup>51</sup> The main theme revolved around the idea that Kennedy and Johnson had made a serious mistake by fundamentally altering the Southeast Asian policies of President Eisenhower. According to the study, Eisenhower had stuck to a policy of giving political, monetary and military aid to South Vietnam while making sure not to commit American ground troops to a land war in South Vietnam.<sup>52</sup> Essentially, the study laid the blame for the Vietnam war at the feet of the Democrats. The report ended by asking two basic questions for Republicans to address. The first read, "What precisely is our national interest in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos", the second read, "To what further lengths are we prepared to go in support of this interest?"<sup>53</sup> The report's publication, instead of uniting Republicans around a single Vietnam policy, had the opposite effect of further dividing members of the party.

The report was welcomed by GOP doves Aiken, Hatfield and Cooper while it was strongly denounced by hawks Thurmond, Tower (Texas), Curtis (Nebraska) and Mundt (South Dakota). The apparent dissent in the party was very worrisome to the party hierarchy. Dirksen, Ford and Laird (the Wisconsin chairman of the House Republican Conference) had steadfastly stuck to a policy of public unity and support of Johnson's policy because they believed that if and when the public became dissatisfied with the

<sup>50</sup> Walter A. Zelman, *Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968* (Toledo, Ohio: University Microfilms, 1971), p. 287.

<sup>51</sup> Zelman, p. 287. As Zelman observed, the study did not present an objective view of the history of the conflict. He wrote, "From the point of view of impartial political analysis the Republican White Paper left much to be desired; it completely omitted the fact that Eisenhower was prepared to intervene militarily in Indochina in 1954; it did not acknowledge the fact that it had been the Republicans, not the Democrats, that had given President Johnson his strongest support on Vietnam policy; it did not acknowledge that its objections to Johnson's Vietnam policy (with the exception of the references to Eisenhower) bore much greater resemblance to statements of the Democratic doves than to anything Republicans (with a few exceptions) had said in the past seven years. But the weaknesses and the highly partisan nature of the analysis in the White Paper were, in many ways, irrelevant. The fact was that the paper was highly critical of the nation's Vietnam policy." Zelman, p. 289.

<sup>52</sup> Zelman, p. 287-289.

<sup>53</sup> *The New York Times*, May 2, 1967, sect. 1, p. 12, col. 4.

administration, they would naturally turn to the Republicans.<sup>54</sup> Dirksen felt strongly that this passive political strategy had been largely responsible for Republican gains in the 1966 mid-term elections. For this reason, Dirksen moved quickly to quell the impression of dissent in the GOP. The Minority leader had been convalescing in Walter Reed following a bout with pneumonia but he emerged from the hospital, after staying up half the night, to issue a statement.<sup>55</sup> Dirksen's statement read, in part; "preserving wholly the right of full and fair inquiry and criticism, we reiterate our wholehearted support of the Commander in Chief or our armed forces. We reaffirm our position standing four-square behind him and our field, air and sea commanders in Southeast Asia."<sup>56</sup> Dirksen stressed to reporters that the report should not be interpreted as a Republican disassociation from administration policy. Ford and Laird joined Dirksen in strong support of Johnson and quickly quashed any talk of Republican dissent in the House of Representatives.

Dirksen's strong defense of administration policy was not enough to keep silent dissenting Republican voices in the Senate. George Aiken led the charge of criticism against the White House by immediately issued a statement supporting the conclusions of the GOP White Paper and rising in the Senate to attack administration policies. The Vermont Senator wanted to insure that other Republican Senate doves resisted the pressure exerted by Dirksen to present a unified GOP position and continued to speak out against American policies in Vietnam. Aiken took the occasion of the issuing of the report to commence a new strategy in his fight to scale back American involvement in Vietnam. Up until this moment, Aiken had sought to influence the administration by gentle persuasion while continuing to adhere to the bipartisan approach to foreign affairs. The Vermont Senator was keenly aware of his place in the Senate, he did not want to jeopardize it by becoming isolated in his criticism as men like Morse and Gruening had. Aiken realized that striking out on his own and engaging in heavy criticism of the administration would open him up to charges of crass partisanship on an issue affecting America's fighting men in the field. Aiken knew that the issuing of the White Paper had revealed that widespread dissatisfaction with

---

<sup>54</sup> *The Boston Globe*, May 9, 1967. Aiken Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Crate 39, Box 5, Folder 22.

<sup>55</sup> "The Great What-Is-It" *Newsweek*, May 15, 1967, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> *The New York Times*, May 3, 1967, sect. 1, p. 2, col. 4.

Vietnam policy existed within the Republican Party. In an attempt to make Vietnam a campaign issue in 1968, Aiken used the study as an opportunity to begin attacking the GOP's adherence to a unified, bipartisan approach to foreign policy.

The reason for this new strategy was simple. Aiken no longer believed that Lyndon Johnson could achieve a peaceful settlement to the war in Vietnam. In a speech he made in the Senate on May 2, 1967, and in a press release issued the same day, Aiken said, in part;

the Vietnam conflict has split the country to a depth and with an intensity not experienced within this century. I know the President wants to bring this conflict to an honourable end. So do I. But, the President predicates peace on the capitulation of the enemy and that solution seems far in the distance, if at all. As time passes, I come more and more to believe that the present administration cannot achieve an honourable peace in Vietnam. This administration is too bound by its vague criterion, its own predictions, its own predilections, its own conceptions and emotional commitments to see the interest of the Nation except in terms of its own survival as the government in power. The significance for the Republican Party of this brief analysis is that American policy in Asia requires a new look - a fresh appraisal that can only come from a Republican administration. New faces and new ideas and a fresh analysis of the National interest is required.<sup>57</sup>

By making the war a legitimate campaign issue Aiken was attempting to remove the stigma attached to offering a dissenting opinion on American foreign policy, especially as it related to an issue involving American forces involved in battle. Aiken felt that American policy in Vietnam could only be changed with the election of a Republican administration and he firmly believed that the issue could be used to elect a Republican candidate in 1968. However, the defeat of Lyndon Johnson alone would not achieve Aiken's ultimate goal of extricating the United States from Vietnam if a Republican hawk was elected to the White House. For this reason, Aiken wanted to try to insure that the Republican Presidential candidate in 1968, whoever that might be, understood that a more moderate Vietnam position could be used as an effective weapon against the Johnson administration.

Dirksen did not agree with Aiken, however, and he used his power and influence as Senate Minority Leader to insure that the White Paper did not become the basis of a new Republican position on Vietnam. At a meeting of the Republican Policy Committee on May 9, 1967, Dirksen saw to it that the report was shelved and not discussed. The Illinois Senator referred to the report as a "historical document", one that

---

<sup>57</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., pp. 11436-37.

could be used as a history of the war for high schools.<sup>58</sup> The Minority Leader sought to discredit the report by denigrating it in this manner but no amount of Dirksen rhetoric could hide the increasing polarization between GOP hawks and doves in the Senate.<sup>59</sup>

In the months following the release of the Republican White Paper, more and more GOP Senators began to speak out forcefully against the war. Some men such as Percy of Illinois, Morton of Kentucky, Javits of New York and Hatfield of Oregon had spoken out prior to this point but their criticism became more pointed. Republican colleagues Cooper of Kentucky, Case of New Jersey, Carlson of Kansas and Brooke of Massachusetts, who once again shifted his view on the war, rejoining the opposition, soon joined them in their dissent.<sup>60</sup> Each of the men followed their own path to dissent but by the end of 1967 all of them had, to varying degrees, spoken out against U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam.

Percy, along with Hatfield and Brooke, was elected to the Senate for the first time in 1966. During the election campaign Percy, along with his assistant Scott Cohen, had been one of the first to come up with the idea that the nations of Asia should convene a peace conference in order to work out a settlement to the war. Percy espoused the idea as a means of differentiating himself from the fiercely pro-war stance of his incumbent Democratic opponent, Paul Douglas.<sup>61</sup> While Percy did not advocate a precipitous withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia, his moderate stand on the war and his subsequent victory in November 1966 was viewed as a significant warning that overly hawkish stands on the war could prove troublesome to Democrats in some areas of the United States.

Percy continued to speak out against the war. His stand on the conflict and on other issues such as housing and aid for inner cities put the junior Senator from Illinois into the national spotlight. He was touted as a possible Presidential contender in some circles.<sup>62</sup> In April of 1967 he gave a widely reported speech in which he called for the direct participation of the Vietcong in peace negotiations. He also labeled American insistence that Hanoi end its supplying of Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops in

---

<sup>58</sup> *The New York Times*, May 10, 1967, sect. 1, p. 20, col. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Dietz, p. 121.

<sup>60</sup> Brooke called for a complete reassessment of the bombing campaign. He said, "if the President has any valid reasons as to why there should not be a cessation of bombing, I think he should make those reasons crystal clear to the American people." Quoted in Gibbons, p. 840. Brooke no longer believed that the administration's policies would bring North Vietnam to the bargaining table, and he ruled out the possibility of continued troop increases before South Vietnam had committed itself more forcefully to winning the war.

<sup>61</sup> Gibbons, p. 392.

<sup>62</sup> *The New York Times*, April 23, 1967, sect. 4, p. 10, cols. 5-8. In the October, 1967, Harris survey of Presidential contenders, Percy out polled Lyndon Johnson 41-40. Gibbons, p. 807.

South Vietnam as a prerequisite to negotiations as unrealistic.<sup>63</sup> In August he began to sound a theme of domestic neglect caused by expenditures on Vietnam. He criticized President Johnson for committing the U.S. deeper and deeper into Southeast Asia while lamenting the fact that "we have our battles to fight in our own country, battles against poverty and hunger and ignorance, battles for justice and equality."<sup>64</sup> In October Percy introduced a sense of the Senate resolution that called for greater Asian contribution to the conflict. Although the resolution was never submitted to a vote, the fact that it was cosponsored by twenty-two of his colleagues offered further proof of the disquiet in the Senate over U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Mark Hatfield's election campaign, like Percy's, revolved around the issue of Vietnam. Although the war was not the only issue in Oregon's 1966 Senate election race, it did play a central role in Hatfield's election. Hatfield defeated a pro-war Democratic Representative, Robert Duncan, to win his Senate seat.<sup>65</sup> Once he entered the Senate, Hatfield joined its antiwar bloc, although as a junior Senator his influence was rather limited during the remainder of the Johnson years. He spoke out against the administration's handling of the war, especially its attempts to muzzle domestic critics. He also echoed Percy's call for an all-Asian peace conference while stressing the need to replace American troops with Asian forces. Hatfield's outspoken views on the war made him a popular speaker on college campuses and he continued to speak out throughout 1967.<sup>66</sup>

John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky joined the growing chorus of Republican voices speaking out against the war. Although Cooper had previously expressed his displeasure over U.S. policies in Southeast Asia, he had remained silent on the issue since joining the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the beginning of 1967. On May 15 of that year, Cooper decided that the time had come to speak out once again. In a Senate speech, Cooper warned the Johnson administration that continued escalation of the war could have the catastrophic effect of bringing China into the conflict, paving the way towards a third

---

<sup>63</sup> *The New York Times*, April 23, 1967, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 6. Percy said, regarding the Vietcong, that "I have long felt it has been unrealistic for Saigon - and therefore ourselves - to propose negotiations with Hanoi without inviting the Vietcong to fully participate if we truly hope to see negotiations come about in the foreseeable future."

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Dietz, p. 121.

<sup>65</sup> Although the war was a critical issue in some races, notably those in Illinois and Oregon, the 1966 elections were not a referendum on the war. The Democrats did lose forty-seven House seats and four Senate seats in the election but many of the races were dominated by issues other than the war. Gibbons, p. 445.

<sup>66</sup> *The New York Times*, April 17, 1967, sect. 1, p. 14, cols. 4-5.

world war.<sup>67</sup> In order to avert such a possibility, Cooper proposed that the United States initiate a policy wherein its bombing would be confined "to infiltration routes near the demilitarized zones where men and supplies enter South Vietnam over the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, or through Laos."<sup>68</sup> Cooper hoped that such a policy would lead North Vietnam to respond by offering to negotiate a settlement, the first step, in Cooper's view, towards peace. This proposal, like most others made by Senators during this period, was predicated on the idea that Hanoi would respond to American gestures at de-escalation by entering peace talks, a remote possibility at best.

Cooper's proposal was, however, greeted with enthusiasm by a number of Senators. Milton Young, a conservative Republican from North Dakota, a previously ardent supporter of the war, said that he found merit in Cooper's ideas on bombing. Although Young remained a supporter of the war and refrained from criticizing the administration outright, the fact that this Senator, well regarded by his colleagues, would commend Cooper's proposals revealed the depth of concern in the Senate regarding continued escalation of the conflict.<sup>69</sup>

The speech was also well received by a number of Democrats, including Fulbright, Mansfield, Church, Pell, McCarthy and Morse. Other Republicans such as Carlson of Kansas, a fellow member of the SFRC, also supported Cooper's ideas. Carlson, although never an outright dove, was becoming less and less pleased with the direction of U.S. policy. His dissatisfaction only became readily apparent following the Tet offensive of 1968 when he questioned whether the Johnson White House had lost the support of the civilian population. Aiken also offered his firm support for Cooper's speech. Aiken agreed wholeheartedly with Cooper's suggestion that a greater war loomed as a possibility, saying, "there is no question that the present policy of escalating higher and higher is bringing us pretty close to a world calamity."<sup>70</sup> Aiken

---

<sup>67</sup> *The New York Times*, May 16, 1967, sect. 1, p. 6, cols. 4-6. Cooper said that his purpose was "to ask our Government to consider thoroughly whether the expanding use of our vast power in North Vietnam will not lead us to a point where the last possibility for a peaceful settlement of the war will not be foreclosed. That point could be reached when the military power of the United States applied through ever increasing bombing compels North Vietnam to ask Communist China to come to its aid. If such a call is made it is difficult to believe that Communist China claiming leadership of the militant vanguard of the Communist world would stand by while a Communist state on its borders goes down to a crushing defeat."

<sup>68</sup> *The New York Times*, May 16, 1967, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Gibbons, p. 684.

<sup>70</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 12582. Commenting on the fact that U.S. officials had been giving rosy estimates about the success of the war effort since 1962, Aiken said "As each move on our part has gone a little farther, our success is still much farther in the distance than it was before, and the advisers, who did not give too good advice in the first place, now say we have not won because the war is not big enough. So they make it a little bigger. Now we have come to the point where they cannot make it much bigger without taking it into new territories; and if we take in the new territory, new countries as opposition, it will undoubtedly mean that we would, before long, be using the ultimate in weapons."



was gratified that fellow members of the Republican Party had begun to speak out against the war and he tried to praise each speech, which called for de-escalating the conflict.

Perhaps the most notable dissenting voice to emerge from the Republican Senate caucus in 1967 was that of Thurston Morton of Kentucky. Morton had begun to have doubts about the war early in the year and he was quick to praise Cooper's May 15 speech.<sup>71</sup> Although privately Morton had declared his firm opposition to the war by mid-August, he did not publicly declare his dissent until September 27. In a speech that day before the National Committee of Business Executives for Peace in Vietnam, Morton said that U.S. policy was bankrupt. Morton declared his belief that Johnson had been "brainwashed by the military-industrial complex" into believing that the U.S. could win a military victory in Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> Morton admitted that he had erred as well, saying that "if the President had been mistaken, so have I. In early 1965 when the President began to escalate the war, I supported the increased military involvement. I was wrong!"<sup>73</sup> Morton's reversal of position generated an enormous amount of attention, largely because of his forthright admission that he had been wrong but also because he was highly regarded by his Senate colleagues and seen as somewhat of a political weathervane in that legislative body.<sup>74</sup> Johnson recognized Morton's importance to his Senate colleagues and immediately called him down to the White House in an attempt to change his view on the war. Morton later recalled that Johnson "really twisted my arm. He gave me a long lecture on how wrong I was and how vital it was for our country and its position of leadership in the world that we see this thing through in Vietnam."<sup>75</sup> Johnson was unable to change the Kentucky Senator's mind, however, and Morton remained an opponent of the war. Morton's conversion to a Senate dissenter revealed how big a problem Johnson had in keeping Senators on his side concerning Vietnam.

---

<sup>71</sup> Eight days after Cooper's speech, Morton rose in the Senate to warn that the Johnson administration was leading the public to believe that a military victory was possible. Morton painted a picture of total victory as one that required 500,000 to 2,000,000 U.S. troops as well as a land invasion of North Vietnam to insure that Hanoi would not continue to attempt to subjugate South Vietnam. He concluded by saying that "I believe the administration is committing a tragic oversight if it permits the dangerous illusion to persist across our country that a total military victory in Vietnam is in the cards. I believe an unhealthy and unproductive war fever is mounting in the United States, and that only the most careful and calculated program initiated from the White House will be able to lower the temperature." Gibbons, p. 687.

<sup>72</sup> *The New York Times*, September 28, 1967, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Gibbons, p. 827. Morton offered a six-step path towards negotiations. He called for an immediate end to the bombing, an end to U.S. search and destroy missions, a version of the Gavin plan, widespread reform in South Vietnam, an all-Asia peace conference and a statement to Hanoi and the world that the U.S. sought a response to its unilateral disengagement. *The New York Times*, September 28, 1967, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 1 and p. 2, cols. 1-3.

<sup>74</sup> Don Oberdorfer, "The 'Wobble' on the War on Capitol Hill," *The New York Times Magazine*, December 17, 1967, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 828.

Aiken's insistence on trying to make Vietnam a legitimate campaign issue seemed to achieve his goal of making dissent more politically palatable to some of his Republican Senate colleagues. Although men such as Morton, Cooper, Javits and Case had come to believe the war was a mistake on personal moral grounds, the fact that opposition to the war was slowly becoming less of a political negative made it easier for them to make their dissent public. Dirksen and the Republican leadership continued to stress that their Party stood behind Johnson's Vietnam policy but they were unable to close the fissure that opened following the publication of the GOP White Paper. By the end of 1967, Aiken could count at least eight of his Republican colleagues as open opponents of the war.

Among Democrats, the number of Senate dissenters continued to grow throughout 1967 as well. The overriding factor in the increasing number of critical Senators lay in the fact that Lyndon Johnson's middle-of-the-road strategy was not working. Johnson had tried to straddle the ground between hawks on one side and doves on the other but the President's policy course was undermined by the fact that the hoped for early end to the war had not materialized. It had become apparent that the United States would have to remain in Vietnam for many years. Hawks complained bitterly that military restraints were preventing U.S. armed forces from achieving a quick knockout blow. Doves, meanwhile, criticized the war on moral and practical grounds, arguing that Vietnam did not constitute a threat to American security and it diverted funds and attention away from serious domestic problems.<sup>76</sup> Hawks and doves were united by one goal, however, the early extraction of the United States from the conflict in Southeast Asia.

Johnson's problems intensified during the summer of 1967. The President's military advisers requested a 200,000-man troop increase and permission to expand the war. Johnson refused to authorize expanding the war and allowed only for an increase of 55,000 troops. The decision satisfied neither hawks nor doves.<sup>77</sup> In August, recognizing that the war's costs were ballooning the national deficit, Johnson sent a request to Congress asking for a ten percent tax surcharge in order to raise the needed revenue for spiraling war costs.<sup>78</sup> These two events focused the attention of Congress and the public on the war's cost and its potential to drag on for years. As Aiken had repeatedly warned, the cost of the war had continued

---

<sup>76</sup> Herring, p. 172.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

<sup>78</sup> Gibbons, p. 754.

to increase apace, requiring a massive tax increase to pay its costs.<sup>79</sup> The price, in monetary terms, of continuing the war had finally reached Americans in a real, tangible manner.

Another incident in the summer of 1967 brought trouble for the President. In late June, Johnson authorized the dispatch of three C-130 transport planes as well as maintenance and support troops along with protective units of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne division to the Congo. The forces were sent in order to help the Congo's President, Joseph D. Mobutu, put down a rebellion against his government.<sup>80</sup> Secretary of State Dean Rusk gave the impression, in phone calls to Fulbright and Richard Russell and in comments to reporters, that American lives were in danger and the planes and men were needed to protect them. It became readily apparent, however, that the forces were being used solely as a means of protecting and preserving Mobutu and his government.<sup>81</sup>

Russell rose in the Senate on July 10 to denounce the actions of the Johnson administration. Russell deemed the action an "unjustified intervention in a local disturbance", saying further that he felt it was "immoral to send even one American boy into a country where we have no commitments and where we have no vital interests. We should have enough common sense to keep our weapons and our people out of situations of this kind all over the world."<sup>82</sup> Russell's bitter attack against the Congo intervention was an obvious swipe at Johnson's Vietnam policy. As chairman of the Armed Services Committee, the conservative Russell occupied an important position in the Senate, and his biting criticism indicated that the White House was losing support from some of the firmest advocates of a strong military approach in Southeast Asia.

The following day Aiken spoke in the Senate and expressed his opposition to the administration's handling of the situation in the Congo. In a discourse on Vietnam, Aiken said, in referring to the Congo, "I do not think that it was a smart move that we made in Africa. I was very much interested that on this floor statements were made in which they got good advice from people far better advised in military

---

<sup>79</sup> On July 11, 1967, Aiken, commenting on rumours that the White House was considering raises taxes, said "We hear that the administration now says we must have a tax increase to meet these additional costs. They have already moved around figures relating to the financial condition of the Government until they cannot really move any further without a tax increase. They talk about a 6-percent increase. More recently we hear it may go to 10-percent. People who know Government financing say it will require an 18-20 percent surtax on the income taxes of this country to meet the additional costs which have incurred over in Southeastern Asia." *Congressional Record - Senate*, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 18370.

<sup>80</sup> John A. Goldsmith, *Colleagues: Richard B. Russell and his Apprentice, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Washington, DC, 1993), p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> Woods, p. 456.

<sup>82</sup> *The New York Times*, July 11, 1967, sect. 1, p. 4, col. 3.

tactics than I am.”<sup>83</sup> In a particularly bitter vein, Aiken said that he had “no advice to give the administration. They would not take it if I gave it. So what is the use of wasting my breath?”<sup>84</sup> Aiken no longer believed that he could influence the Johnson administration by speaking out against mistakes that he believed were being made in foreign policy. Aiken’s view that a Republican administration was needed to change the direction of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia was becoming more and more solidified. The Vermont Senator remained a strong party man, regardless of his differences over Vietnam with the GOP leadership in Congress. For this reason, he resisted calling for a Democrat, with intentions of seeking a peace in Vietnam, to challenge the President in 1968. Aiken did not want to get involved with the internal political fights of the Democratic Party, he remained concerned only with his fellow Republicans and their chances of winning back the White House. This changed as the presidential election of 1968 drew nearer.

The outcry generated by the Congo intervention also served to unite the right and the left against the administration. Fulbright capitalized on Russell’s anger with the administration to appeal for the Georgia Senator’s support of a national commitment resolution, which would declare the Senate’s reassertion of a legislative role in foreign affairs. Fulbright had concluded privately that in order to further erode Congressional and public support for the war he had to induce hawks into parting with administration policy. To accomplish this among his fellow Senators, Fulbright sought to exploit the one issue that he believed conservative Democrats and Republicans would respond positively to, namely their opposition to a powerful and activist executive branch.<sup>85</sup> Fulbright believed that this issue, combined with a commitment to a strict reading of the Constitution, would find support among colleagues such as Russell, Sparkman and Symington.

As a member of the Southern Democratic bloc in the Senate, Fulbright had maintained a close friendship with Russell, even as they parted ways over Vietnam. Fulbright used this relationship to urge Russell to introduce a bill that embodied the elements of the national commitments resolution that the

---

<sup>83</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 18370. Aiken commented further, “I would like to see someone in our Government admit making a mistake. It would make him a big person. I have often thought that anyone in a high position in Government ought to make one mistake so that he can admit it and gain or regain the respect of the people.”

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Woods, p. 442.

SFRC Chief of Staff, Carl Marcy, had written over the preceding months.<sup>86</sup> Although Russell refused to introduce the resolution himself, he promised Fulbright that he would immediately endorse the bill upon its introduction. On July 31, Fulbright introduced the resolution to the Senate, saying that "All too often, over a long period the executive branch has indeed acted and then sought to justify its intervention by dubious references to equally dubious prior commitments. In its essence, this resolution represents a conservative position which seeks to recover in some degree the constitutional role of the Senate in the making of foreign policy - a role which the Senate itself has permitted to be obscured and diminished over the years."<sup>87</sup> The resolution was merely an expression of the sense of the Senate and would not be submitted to the House of Representatives for study but Fulbright stressed that it represented the first step in a struggle for the legislative branch to reassert its role in foreign affairs.

As he promised, Russell was the first to endorse the resolution. He was joined by a number of Senators including Morton, Symington, Church, Morse, McCarthy, Carlson, Allott, Mansfield and Aiken. Fulbright's success in appealing to both hawks and doves was made apparent by the support of these colleagues, Senators who represented a broad range of views on foreign affairs. For his part, Aiken echoed Fulbright's call for the Senate to assert itself once again although he stressed that Congress was to blame for the erosion of its power. Aiken said, "Over the last 25 years, we have told the executive it would be easier for you to go ahead and take care of this."<sup>88</sup> Aiken said further that he hoped that "Congress - particularly the Senate - will realize its responsibilities and its obligations in the field of formulating foreign policy which the executive branch is bound, by the Constitution, to carry out", adding that he "emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the Congress to formulate our foreign policies. We have almost abdicated that responsibility in the past decade or so. It is about time we realized that we should again function as was intended by the Constitution of the United States."<sup>89</sup> In these statements Aiken made clear his support for Fulbright's resolution.

---

<sup>86</sup> Woods, p. 456. In a letter to Russell, Fulbright included the draft of the resolution. It read:

*Whereas* accurate definition of the term, national commitments, in recent years had become obscured: Therefore be it

*Resolved*, That it is the sense of the Senate that a national commitment by the United States to a foreign power necessarily and exclusively results from affirmative action taken by the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. Government through means of a treaty, convention, or other legislative instrumentality specifically intended to give effect to such a commitment. Gibbons, p. 810.

<sup>87</sup> *The New York Times*, August 1, 1967, section 1, p. 4, col. 5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 20673.

In his speech, Aiken also touched on the greater issue surrounding the national commitments resolution, the debate over whether or not the United States should have a military presence in Asia, let alone in Vietnam. Aiken said that he hoped to "encourage consideration of the basic question of whether our national interest requires the stationing of American forces on the continent of Asia for the - and I use the words: unforeseeable future, or whether our national interest requires redeployment of our forces so that we do not have bases on the continent of Asia."<sup>90</sup> Aiken stated his belief that the United States should not station forces in Asia in order to resist aggression because "no one has ever been able to define the word aggression to the satisfaction of more than one side in any conflict", but he outlined reasons which might require the United States to station troops there, saying "it may, and I emphasize the word 'may,' it may be in our interest to keep American forces on the continent of Asia for more clearly defined reasons, such as maintaining access to raw materials, keeping open lines of communication, or to keep a potential enemy from mounting weapons which could be used to attack the United States."<sup>91</sup> Aiken was clearly advocating taking the United States away from an activist, moralistic foreign policy to a more pragmatic outlook. Aiken believed that the Vietnamese conflict was essentially a civil war, one that did not involve the vital interests of the United States. Aiken did not believe in the domino theory, therefore he did not subscribe to the theory that allowing South Vietnam to be taken over by communist forces was the first step towards losing all of Asia. Aiken hoped to initiate a national debate over whether or not it was vital for American interests to have bases in Asia, and if it was, what were the reasons for having them.<sup>92</sup>

The Foreign Relations Committee began five days of public hearings on Fulbright's resolution on August 16, 1967. The most important witness called before the committee was Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach. Katzenbach's two days of testimony, on August 17 and 21, created a firestorm of controversy among members of the committee and the Senate as a whole. The controversy revolved around Katzenbach's testimony regarding the question of whether or not the administration was required,

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* Regarding whether or not the commitment of U.S. forces in Asia hampered the Government's actions, Aiken said "It is becoming clearer by day that the cost to the United States in men and resources to maintain half a million men in Vietnam and 50,000 men in Korea - also 30,000 to 40,000 men in Thailand and smaller numbers elsewhere - restricts our ability to react not only to military threats closer to home, but it also restricts severely our capacity to deal with pressing internal problems of this Nation - and there are internal problems in this Nation."

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken said, "in short, what I hope by this statement is to encourage consideration of the basic question of whether our national interest requires stationing of American forces on the continent of Asia for the-and I use the words: unforeseeable future, and whether our national interest requires redeployment of our forces so that we do not have bases on the continent of Asia."

under the terms of the Constitution, to ask the Congress for a declaration of war in conflicts such as Vietnam.

Katzenbach insisted that a declaration of war was not needed because, in his words, it would not “correctly reflect the very limited objectives of the United States with respect to Vietnam. It would not correctly reflect our efforts there, what we are trying to do, the reasons why we are there. To use an outmoded phraseology, to declare war.”<sup>93</sup> Under further questioning from Fulbright, Katzenbach did acknowledge that Congress had a right to express itself on major foreign policy questions such as Vietnam but he insisted that it had been given the opportunity to do so during debates on the Southeast Asia Treaty (SEATO) and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.<sup>94</sup> Katzenbach said that “on those resolutions Congress had the opportunity to participate and did participate. The combination of the two, it seems to me, fully fulfills the obligation of the executive in a situation of this kind to participate with the Congress, to give the Congress a full and effective voice, the functional equivalent, the constitutional obligation expressed in the provision of the Constitution with respect to declaring war.”<sup>95</sup> Fulbright contended that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution could not be considered a proper substitute for a declaration of war. Katzenbach insisted that the resolution was all that the President needed to conduct the war. The SFRC Chairman responded by stating that the resolution was adopted “under conditions of great emergency. It wasn’t a deliberate decision by the Congress to wage war in that full-fledged sense against a foreign government.”<sup>96</sup> Under questioning from Senator Albert Gore, Katzenbach also claimed that the resolution allowed the President the authority to conduct the war in any manner that involved the defense of South Vietnam against aggression. According to the Under Secretary the resolution had given the President the authority to use the armed forces in any form he desired, and that included using ground forces in South Vietnam as well as the bombing of China, if that became necessary.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> *The New York Times*, August 18, 1967, sect. 1, p. 14, col. 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, and Gibbons, p. 813.

<sup>95</sup> *The New York Times*, August 18, 1967, sect. 1, p. 14, cols. 4-5.

<sup>96</sup> Gibbons, p. 814. In referring to the Gulf Of Tonkin Resolution, Katzenbach said “didn’t that resolution authorize the President to use the armed forces of the United States in whatever way was necessary. Didn’t it? What could a declaration of war have done that would have given the President more authority and a clearer voice of Congress than that?” *The New York Times*, August 18, 1967, sect. 1, p. 14, col. 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

The following day President Johnson held a news conference during which he echoed Katzenbach's statements. Johnson said that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was more of a consultative process rather than Congressional approval of the right of the legislative branch to wage the war in Vietnam. He said, "We stated then, and we repeat now, we did not think the resolution was necessary to do what we did and what we're doing."<sup>98</sup> Johnson then seemed to issue a challenge to Congress to repeal the resolution, saying "some of the members of the Congress felt that they should amend the resolution, even as amendments had already been put in by members, to provide that if at any time the Congress felt that the authority delegated in the resolution should be withdrawn, that the Congress without waiting for a recommendation from the President who might differ with them, could withdraw that authority by just passing a resolution which did not require the President's veto. They could do it themselves. So the machinery is there any time the Congress desires to withdraw its views on the matter."<sup>99</sup> Johnson was well aware that Fulbright had no intention of bringing the matter to a vote so issuing this challenge held no danger for the President.

Fulbright knew that he did not have the votes in Congress to pass a resolution and he was also aware that voting against American troops in the field, no matter the declining support for Johnson's Vietnam policies, would prove to be politically dangerous for any member of Congress.<sup>100</sup> In a television interview on August 20, Fulbright said that he foresaw no likelihood of a repeal of the resolution, adding that "politically a repeal would be a direct slap at a leader in a time of war. It will not be done that way. The disillusionment, the dissent, that will be expressed in other less direct ways."<sup>101</sup> Fulbright cited the uproar over the Congo intervention and the opposition in the Senate as examples of this type of dissent. Fulbright also referred to an Associated Press poll of 84 Senators that revealed that 40 of those polled no longer supported President Johnson's policy as evidence that a "decided Congressional shift against continuation and escalation of the war toward seeking a negotiated, honourable peace" had occurred.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> *The New York Times*, August 19, 1967, sect. 1, p. 10, col. 8.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> "Fulbright's Dilemma" *Newsweek*, August 28, 1967, p. 19, and Woods, p. 443.

<sup>101</sup> *The New York Times*, August 21, 1967, sect. 1, p. 7, cols. 2-3.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* It should be noted that a number of the Senators surveyed hoped that Johnson would sharply escalate the war in order to achieve a favourable military settlement of the war. Of the 40 Senators expressing dissatisfaction, 26 were Democrats and 19 Republicans.



Aiken was one of the Senators surveyed who expressed disagreement with Johnson's policies. He stressed that he had not envisioned a major war when he had voted for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution but he along with other Senators realized that there was no point in rescinding it. He said that Johnson "knows perfectly well it's impossible to rescind... We're in a war now."<sup>103</sup> Aiken also expressed outrage, as many other Senators did, over Katzenbach's testimony and in particular, his use of the phrase "functional equivalent" to describe the Congressional role in approving Johnson's Vietnam policies. Aiken said that Katzenbach's contention that declarations of war were not in keeping with modern situations such as Vietnam was "typical of this administration's high-handedness. What he was saying is that the executive branch has progressed nicely with modern times but Congress has remained stuck in the mud as far as acting on these issues."<sup>104</sup> Aiken echoed the feelings of many in the Senate who believed that the remark epitomized the attitude that the White House held regarding Congressional participation in foreign affairs, that it was up to the Executive branch alone to determine the role of Congress in the decision to use the Armed Forces.<sup>105</sup>

In the ensuing months, the Foreign Relations Committee met on several occasions in executive session to discuss the national commitments resolution. At its November 1 meeting, Fulbright made it clear that he believed it was imperative that the committee complete its report to the general Senate as soon as possible, although he did not expect to call up the resolution for general debate until 1968. Frank Lausche criticized the resolution on the grounds that it was not an appropriate time to challenge the constitutionality of the President's deployment of troops in Vietnam. Fulbright responded by saying that "if you don't do these things when the matter is critical and on the public's mind then you don't do it all. If you don't do it now it will be absolutely forgotten."<sup>106</sup> Other members of the committee such as Cooper, Case, Pell and Symington sought to change the wording of the resolution. John Sparkman wanted to make sure that the resolution was not interpreted as a critique of Vietnam policy. He said that "everything that

---

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 815.

<sup>104</sup> *The Evening Star*, August 18, 1967, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 6, Folder 2. Aiken had said on August 7 that if the administration did not listen to reason in the near future "it will have written one of the worst chapters in American history, or indeed, in world history." This was one of Aiken's strongest statements against the White House to date. *The Times Reporter*, August 8, 1967, Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 6, Folder 2.

<sup>105</sup> Gibbons, p. 813.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 820.

goes out of here is going to be construed by the press as being critical of what we are doing there, and I think we ought to support U.S. forces just as strongly as we can as long as we are in there and get out the best way we can as soon as we can."<sup>107</sup> Sparkman had vigorously supported the war but his comments indicated that he had developed serious misgivings concerning the progress of U.S. policy.

Aiken expressed concern that the resolution would be defeated if it were brought to a vote on the Senate floor. Aiken believed that its defeat would allow Johnson to once again claim that he had the support of the Senate for his actions in Vietnam. Aiken said that "If it goes to the floor and comes up for action next spring it is going to be put on the basis of are you for the boys who are fighting and dying in Vietnam or are you for Hanoi, and it will be defeated by a four to one vote and that would undo much of the good which the resolution had done. I have seen so many times when a resolution or a bill has done much more good than its passage would do, and I am not sure but what we have got one of those here."<sup>108</sup> Aiken then reiterated his belief that only a defeat of Johnson at the polls could accomplish the goals of the Senate doves. He lamented the fact that, in his opinion, the President had "grossly abused" his power, but he added that "I don't know how I can stop him. He is President, and you can't stop him until next November."<sup>109</sup> Aiken continued to believe that Johnson's defeat was imperative if the United States were going to change its policies in Southeast Asia and he did not want to give the President anything that would damage the chances for that to occur. Changes were made to the resolution that made it more politically palatable to the Senate including making it clear that it was not aimed at the war in Vietnam or other existing commitments but rather at future commitments of U.S. forces as well as narrowing the focus from the broad concept of a national commitment to one involving the deployment of military personnel to a foreign state and the role of Congress in declaring a state of war.<sup>110</sup> Aiken believed that the changes made the resolution more politically palatable to the general Senate and he therefore voted to send it out of committee.

---

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 821-22. Sparkman later claimed in an interview that he tried to defend the interests of the Johnson administration in the committee. Sparkman said that the White House often consulted with him and he kept the administration appraised of committee activities. Johnson Library, John Sparkman Oral History, October 5, 1968, p. 22.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 822.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *The New York Times*, November 17, 1967, sect. 1, p. 2, col. 4.

On November 16, the committee voted 16-0 on a final draft of the resolution and the committee reported it to the Senate on November 20, 1967.<sup>111</sup> The committee also issued a report that made it clear that the SFRC considered the resolution to be the first step in a process of reclaiming Congressional authority in the field of foreign affairs. The report lamented the fact that Congress had allowed the executive branch to usurp its powers via actions taken from the beginning of the century. The report contended that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution represented the apex in the acquiescence of the legislative branch. The report concluded by recommending a series of steps designed to insure that the Senate was fully involved in future decisions regarding the deployment of American troops.<sup>112</sup> Many Senators claimed, rather heatedly, that they had been misled during the debate over the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and this report made plain their desire to insure that such a situation never occurred again. Fulbright, as floor manager of the 1964 Johnson resolution, had become especially bitter over his role in insuring its passage and the 1967 SFRC hearings could be regarded as the Arkansas Senator's attempt to make amends.

At the same time that the SFRC was holding its hearings, the Senate Armed Services Committee's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, chaired by John Stennis (D-Mississippi), held hearings on the conduct of the air war in Vietnam. The hearings were held in executive session between August 9 and August 29. With the exception of Margaret Chase Smith (R-Maine), the committee members took a hawkish stand on the air war. Stuart Symington (D-Missouri), Henry Jackson (D-Washington), Howard Cannon (D-Nevada), Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia), Strom Thurmond (R-South Carolina), and Jack

---

<sup>111</sup> Gibbons, p. 823. The final draft of the resolution read:

Whereas the executive and legislative branches of the United States Government have joint responsibility and authority to formulate the foreign policy of the United States; and

Whereas the authority to initiate war is vested in Congress by the Constitution: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That a commitment for purposes of this resolution means the use of, or promise to a foreign state of people to use, the armed forces of the United States either immediately or upon the happening of certain events, and

That it is the sense of the Senate that, under any circumstances which may arise in the future pertaining to situations in which the United States is not already involved, the commitment of the armed forces of the United States to hostilities on foreign territory for any purpose other than to repel an attack on the United States or to protect United States citizens or property will result from a decision made in accordance with constitutional processes, which, in addition to appropriate executive actions, require affirmative action by Congress specifically intended to give rise to such a commitment.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 824. The steps were:

- (1) debate the proposed resolution at sufficient length to establish a legislative record stating the intent of Congress;
- (2) use the words *authorize* or *empower* or such other language as will leave no doubt that Congress alone has the right to authorize the initiation of war and that, in granting the President authority to use the armed forces, Congress is granting him power that he could not otherwise have;
- (3) state in the resolution as explicitly as possible under the circumstances the kind of military action that is being authorized and the place and purpose of its use;

Miller (R-Iowa), all called for expanding the bombing campaign against North Vietnam. In his opening statement, Stennis set the tone for the hearings by declaring that it was his personal opinion "that it would be a tragic and perhaps fatal mistake for us to suspend or restrict the bombing. I am gratified by the step up in air operations which has occurred since this hearing was announced. It has brought increased pressure on the enemy. I hope this pressure will be further increased and expanded and that it will hasten the end of this unhappy war."<sup>113</sup> Stennis's tough tone reflected not only the feelings of the majority of his committee members, but also the many hawks in the Senate that had become increasingly dissatisfied with U.S. policy in Vietnam.

The committee called a number of U.S. military officials as well as Defense Secretary Robert McNamara as witnesses. The military officials, including the five Chiefs of Staff, all supported the views of Senator Stennis during their appearances. They insisted that the air war was an indispensable component of the conflict and that ending the bombing would prove disastrous for the military effort. Another central argument put forth by the generals and admirals revolved around their belief that meddling by civilians in Washington, particularly as it related to the selection of bombing targets and the policy of gradually increasing the air war, was severely hampering the war effort.<sup>114</sup> McNamara appeared before the committee on August 25. He made it clear that he believed that the bombing campaign served only as an adjunct to the ground campaign in South Vietnam. McNamara said that "the bombing of North Vietnam has always been considered a supplement to and not a substitute for an effective counter-insurgency campaign in South Vietnam."<sup>115</sup> The Defense Secretary wanted to destroy the idea that enlarged bombing attacks could serve as a means of winning the war more easily, with fewer American casualties. McNamara quoted statistics to buttress his argument that bombing had not impeded the ability of North Vietnam to supply its troops in the south nor had it broken the will of the North Vietnamese people to continue the fight. He stressed that nothing short of complete annihilation of North Vietnam and its people could accomplish these two goals.<sup>116</sup> McNamara told the committee he was convinced that "the

---

(4) put a time limit on the resolution, thereby assuring Congress the opportunity to review its decisions and extend or terminate the President's authority to use military force.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 743.

<sup>114</sup> Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York, 1996), pp. 286-287.

<sup>115</sup> *The New York Times*, August 26, 1967, sect. 1, p. 4, col. 1.

<sup>116</sup> McNamara and VanDeMark, p. 286.

final decision in this conflict will not come until we and our allies prove to North Vietnam she cannot win in the South. The tragic and long drawn out character of that conflict in the South makes very tempting the prospect of replacing it with some kind of air campaign against the North. But however tempting, such an alternative seems to me completely illusory. To pursue this objective would not only be futile but would involve risks to our personnel and to our nation that I am unable to comprehend."<sup>117</sup> McNamara's claims, that the bombing campaign had not succeeded in stopping Hanoi's supplying of its troops or breaking the will of its people and that a stepped up air war could not replace the war on the ground in South Vietnam, garnered an enormous amount of press attention and criticism.

Lyndon Johnson was extremely unhappy with his Defense Secretary and proceeded to rake McNamara over the coals in a three-hour meeting. Johnson never regained full trust in McNamara and within six months he had a new Secretary of Defense. The Joint Chiefs of Staff felt betrayed that McNamara had essentially admitted, in their view, that the strategy of bombing North Vietnam had failed and that he had offered such a tepid defense of its merits.<sup>118</sup> The Stennis subcommittee's report chose to ignore McNamara's conclusions, instead it accepted virtually all of the military criticisms offered during the hearings and criticized the administration's handling of the bombing campaign.<sup>119</sup> The report, submitted to the full Armed Services Committee on August 31, 1967, emphasized the committee's belief that the air war should be stepped up, massively, in order to alleviate the pressure on ground forces and to accomplish the goal of bringing the war to an early end, a goal that the committee believed could be achieved.<sup>120</sup> McNamara, once an ardent hawk, had become convinced that further expansion of the war was a mistake, and he had at his disposal the most accurate information available to the U.S. government. The

<sup>117</sup> *The New York Times*, August 26, 1967, sect. 1, p. 4, col. 6.

<sup>118</sup> Gibbons, pp. 751-754.

<sup>119</sup> During the two weeks of testimony, the subcommittee heard from every senior U.S. commander involved in the air war. These military leaders testified that the air war in the North Vietnam was an indispensable component for fighting the war in South Vietnam. The military leaders contended that the air war had impeded infiltration by North Vietnamese forces into South Vietnam, thereby hampering the ability of the enemy to launch sustained attacks against U.S. forces. This had spared American forces thousands of casualties. The subcommittee was also told that civilian leaders had ignored the advice of the military and had refused to lift restrictive controls on the bombing, severely limiting the effectiveness of the air force's efforts. The military was extremely critical of what it termed, the "doctrine of gradualism" employed by the administration. Gibbons, p. 744-745, and *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Volume IV [The Senator Gravel Edition]* (Boston, 1971), p. 199.

<sup>120</sup> Gibbons, pp. 752-753. The report was forceful and direct in its criticisms. It read, in part: "We have employed military aviation in a carefully controlled, restricted, and graduated buildup of bombing pressure which discounted the professional judgment of our best military experts and substituted civilian judgment in the details of target selection and the timing of strikes. We shackled the true potential of airpower and permitted the buildup of what has become the world's most formidable aircraft defenses. The subcommittee is of the opinion that we cannot, in good conscience, ask our ground forces to continue their fight in South Vietnam unless we are prepared to press the air war in the north in the most effective way possible."

committee, however, chose to ignore the evidence presented by the Secretary of Defense, and recommended a massive expansion of the bombing campaign.

McNamara's recommendations, however, were heeded in government circles and although more bombing missions were undertaken in the weeks following the hearings, a large and extended air war and ground campaign was not followed. The hearings highlighted the differences that existed between the generals and McNamara, and the generals subsequently lost all faith in McNamara's judgment and reliability. The report also highlighted the ever-increasing polarization between hawks and doves in the Senate. Although both groups wanted the war brought to an early end, their methods differed tremendously. The criticism offered in the report also increased the public and congressional dissatisfaction with the progress of the war.<sup>121</sup> Once again, Johnson had been unable to quell the criticism coming from both the left and the right, his moderate policy had become increasingly tenuous.

Another Senate initiative was underway at the same time as the Fulbright and Stennis hearings were taking place. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield was urging the administration to submit a peace proposal to the United Nations Security Council. In this initiative, George Aiken supported Mansfield. Mansfield had spoken to Johnson about the UN proposal in an April 29, 1967, meeting at the White House.<sup>122</sup> Johnson gave Mansfield the impression that he supported the Montana Democrat's initiative but in reality the White House treated it as little more than a gimmick. Johnson feared that asking the United Nations to consider the matter might make the United States look weak and could lead to a decline in American prestige around the world.<sup>123</sup> Johnson had given the impression that he backed Mansfield's proposal in an attempt to placate the Senator. The President had terminated contact with most of the Senate doves but he continued to deal closely with Mansfield, partly because of their long and close relationship but principally because of Mansfield's position as the Democratic Senate leader.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 754. By the fall of 1967, the public approval of the President's handling of the Vietnam war had fallen to 28%. In another poll, 45% of respondents said that entering the war had been a mistake, the highest level yet recorded. Herring, p. 174, and David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore and London, 1991), p. 143.

<sup>122</sup> In a speech in North Carolina on March 13, 1967, Mansfield outlined his plan to use the United Nations as a means of ending the conflict. The proposal revolved around two points, the first being "that the Security Council invite all the belligerents, direct and indirect, including China and North Vietnam, to participate in an open discussion of the conflict in Vietnam and ways and means of ending it" and second, "that the Security Council request the International Court to render an advisory opinion on the current applicability of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 and the obligations which these agreements may place on the present belligerents in Vietnam." Quoted in Olson, p. 180.

<sup>123</sup> Olson, p. 183.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Mansfield became increasingly angry as the administration continued to ignore his UN initiative. In a speech that was his most bitter denunciation yet of U.S. policy he commented on Robert McNamara's latest trip to Vietnam and the military's request for 100,000 additional troops. Mansfield feared that the request was only the beginning of a greater expansion of the conflict. In his speech he warned that greater escalation could lead to grave consequences, asking "who will say that a third World War is not already incubating in the ever-deepening and expanding struggle in Southeast Asia?"<sup>125</sup> Mansfield urged that the combatants involved in the conflict take the issue to the UN Security Council. He said, "we need to continue this initiative in order that no stone be left unturned in the effort to bring about a cease-fire and honourable settlement of this ugly war."<sup>126</sup> Aiken immediately offered his support for Mansfield's proposal, saying that "it is unfortunate, Mr. President, that the advice of the majority leader has not been accepted by the administration to the same degree as the advice of certain military leaders who have far more knowledge of weapons than they have of people."<sup>127</sup>

On August 28, Mansfield, in another major Senate speech, once again proposed taking the issue of a peace settlement in Vietnam to the Security Council. The Majority leader took note of the fact that the United States had a February 1966 proposal to reconvene the Geneva Conference pending before the Security Council and stressed that the international body could use this as an opportunity to get the ball rolling on a Vietnam peace conference. Mansfield cautioned that the Security Council would not easily find a solution to the crisis but he said "it is time we took steps to mobilize the diplomatic community of the world on the subject of Vietnam. I am in full accord with the view that the United States should act now to bring a conflict fraught with danger for all the nations of the world before the Security Council."<sup>128</sup> A number of other Senators, including Aiken, Fulbright, Cooper, Symington, Pell, Sparkman, Church, Carlson and Morse rose to give supporting speeches.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 18369.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18370.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken also warned that a million troops would be needed to restore a semblance of order to South Vietnam if the U.S. continued to follow its policies. For this reason he stressed that any effort to insure that Hanoi cease its efforts to subjugate the South would require ever increasing military maneuvers, a situation that could produce pressure to use nuclear weapons, an option he considered unfathomable.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24288.

<sup>129</sup> Gibbons, p. 916.

Aiken was the first of these men to offer support for Mansfield's ideas but he stressed that he believed that the United States should bring the issue before the Security Council in order to force other nations to state their position on Vietnam. Aiken contended that countries such as Russia and France bore some responsibility for the ongoing conflict. Aiken said that the U.S. should not "hold back action because we fear that France or Russia might veto our efforts to bring this conflict to an end. In fact, this is one overwhelming reason why the United States should insist on action by the United Nations in order to place responsibility where it belongs."<sup>130</sup> Although Aiken reiterated his belief that the United States had erred in initiating a bombing campaign against North Vietnam, Aiken contended the United States did not bear sole responsibility for the war in Vietnam. Aiken said that Russia could have taken steps to insure that the conflict had ended sooner but they had instead chosen to intensify the war in an effort to weaken the United States militarily, economically and politically. Aiken made this claim on the basis that Russia, in his view, could have agreed to the reconvening of the Geneva Conference in an effort to end the war. In making these claims, Aiken seemed to be trying to put the onus on the UN to undertake an attempt to end the war. The reason for this lay in the fact that Aiken no longer believed that the Johnson administration could initiate a peace process. At the very least, Aiken hoped that a UN sponsored attempt to broker an end to the conflict would put pressure on the administration to cease any plans to further escalate the war.

On October 25 Mansfield introduced a resolution declaring the "sense of the Senate that the President of the United States consider taking the appropriate initiative through his representative at the United Nations to assure that the United States resolution of January 31, 1966, or any other resolution of equivalent purpose be brought before the Security Council for consideration."<sup>131</sup> After three days of hearings on the Mansfield initiative and a similar one proposed by Senator Morse, the Foreign Relations Committee unanimously reported the Mansfield resolution to the Senate on November 21. On November

<sup>130</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., p. 24288.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Gibbons, p. 919. On October 9, Mansfield had sent a letter outlining his views concerning a UN initiative to all one hundred Senators as well as Secretary of State Dean Rusk and the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Arthur Goldberg. He wrote, in part, that in his judgment, "much might be gained and nothing is to be lost in a sustained attempt to get the UN Security Council to consider Vietnam. At worst, an open defeat of specific moves in this direction can hardly be more opprobrious than rumours and allegations that the United States is preventing negotiations. Even if we cannot muster the votes or are stopped by a permanent member's veto, I believe we have a responsibility to pursue whatever means may be proper and open to us in the Security Council, if for no other reason than to make clear our willingness to lay our position on Vietnam formally on the line. In my judgment, it would have been a worthwhile effort even if consideration by the Security Council served only to clarify the various positions of those directly and indirectly involved in this conflict by bringing them together in face-to-face and open discussions. Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 7, Folder 23.



30. the Senate passed the resolution by a vote of 82-0.<sup>132</sup> Johnson, however, continued to believe that introducing a resolution asking the Security Council to consider Vietnam could tie the hands of the U.S. on Vietnam policy.<sup>133</sup> In December UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg told Johnson that, after discussions at the UN, he had found no "substantial support among Security Council members for formal UN discussions of the Vietnam conflict" existed.<sup>134</sup> The administration resolution was never introduced to the Security Council.

The 82-0 vote in favour of the Mansfield resolution reflected the increasing dissatisfaction with U.S. policy in Vietnam that existed among both Senate hawks and doves. In the Fall of 1967, Congressional criticism of the administration and Johnson personally, continued to escalate. Clifford Case gave a speech in the Senate on September 26 notable for its vehemence and its acerbic language, much of which was aimed directly at the President.<sup>135</sup> During the extended discussion that followed Case's speech, Jacob Javits said that Congress should vote on a new resolution to, replace the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. A few days later Javits elaborated on this idea, claiming that it was imperative that a new resolution be introduced as a means of dealing with the increasing differences of opinion on Vietnam in the Senate and in the country as a whole. He said that such a resolution should be introduced with the goal that it "would represent a new, national consensus on policy with respect to Vietnam."<sup>136</sup>

The increasingly widespread and pointed Congressional criticism of Johnson's policies was echoed by the attitudes of the general public. Public approval of the President's handling of the war dropped to all time lows in the Fall of 1967. The fact that draft calls had exceeded 30,000 per month as well as the increasing death toll in Southeast Asia, 13,000 Americans had died in Vietnam by the Summer of 1967.

---

<sup>132</sup> Olson, p. 188.

<sup>133</sup> Ambassador Goldberg drew up a new resolution for consideration. It read:  
The Security Council, *deeply concerned* about the situation in Vietnam

1. *Expresses* the view that the principles on which hostilities were brought to an end by the Geneva Accords should provide a basis for the restoration of peace;

2. *Urges* that appropriate steps be taken to reactivate the Geneva Conference machinery as the international context in which it appears that fruitful discussions looking toward a settlement are most likely to take place.

Gibbons, p. 921.

<sup>134</sup> Gibbons, p. 922.

<sup>135</sup> *The New York Times*, September 27, 1967, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 5 and p. 14, cols. 3-7. Case, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was described by a fellow Senator as "one of the most earnest and sincere members of our body." Case accused Johnson of provoking a "crisis of confidence" through the "misuse and perversion" of the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Case blasted the administration for not telling the truth about the war's cost and direction. The bitterness of the speech surprised many Senators and in a two-hour debate that followed, many Senators, including dissenters such as Mike Mansfield, rose to defend the President.

<sup>136</sup> *The New York Times*, September 30, 1967, sect. 1, p. 7, col. 1.

brought the war directly into the homes of millions of Americans.<sup>137</sup> The public mood had become angry, tired and frustrated by the seemingly endless, stalemated, winless war and its increasing costs in lives and money, exemplified by the administration's request for a 10% surtax. A substantial majority of Americans had come to believe that the United States had been wrong to intervene in Vietnam and although a firm consensus for either withdrawal or escalation had not yet materialized, exasperation with a war many believed to be of debatable necessity and uncertain purpose continued to grow apace.<sup>138</sup>

As public anxiety increased, the antiwar movement gained momentum. The movement itself had splintered into a number of groups. An older, quieter group of protesters believed in fighting the continuation of the war within the established political system. Among the more radical elements of the movement, however, a feeling began to emerge that civil disobedience and resistance to the draft were the only means through which U.S. policymakers could be forced to change.<sup>139</sup> In October 1967, the biggest demonstration of this sort of antiwar activity took place during "Stop The Draft Week". Throughout the week of October 16-22, numerous demonstrations were held around the country culminating in a chaotic march on the Pentagon during which violence erupted. Numerous people were beaten and arrested by army personnel as they attempted to breach security and enter the Pentagon itself.

Attorney General Ramsey Clark later described the march as "the moment that the fever broke in the whole antiwar movement", describing it further as an event that "energized antiwar forces and spelled the beginning of the end for American involvement in the war."<sup>140</sup> Ironically, support for Johnson increased in the period following the demonstration. The unruly activities of perhaps 3000 of the 20,000 individuals that participated in the Pentagon march led to a generally negative reaction from the American public. Seven out of ten respondents in a poll taken soon after the protest objected to the manner in which it was held.<sup>141</sup> Many Americans found the antiwar movement and its radical elements as distasteful as the war

---

<sup>137</sup> Herring, p. 174.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, and Gibbons, p. 860.

<sup>139</sup> David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore and London, 1991), p. 136.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (London, 1991), p. 110.

<sup>141</sup> Gibbons, p. 868. *Newsweek* described the march this way, "Outside the great granite building, one gaggle of hippies stood atop a flatbed truck shouting, 'out demons, out.' But the mood quickly turned violent, as bottles and cans crashed through the Pentagon windows. In a succession of assault waves, chairman Dave Dillinger himself, along with more than 350 demonstrators, was arrested. Then the vaunted Pentagon defenses cracked. A force of some 2,000 demonstrators swept past a thinly guarded flank near a side entrance - and briefly broke into the building. And at that moment, the discipline of the troops also cracked. Panicky MP's started swinging their sticks and blood began to flow. Down went demonstrator after demonstrator. Reinforcements rushed in and formed a human wall three soldiers deep to keep the swirling attackers at bay." "March on the Pentagon," *Newsweek* (October 30, 1967), p. 21.

itself. Moreover, the image of so-called "hippies" demonstrating against the war may have increased support for the war among Americans who regarded this element of the population as a dangerous, subversive force. Although antiwar protests may not have led more Americans to turn against the war, they did force the issue of Vietnam onto the front burner. It may have also limited Johnson's ability to drastically expand the scope of the war while challenging the accepted rationale for American involvement in the conflict. More than anything else, the disruptions and divisions created by the movement, often pitting family members against each other, caused a great amount of weariness and distress among the public and lawmakers in Washington, a situation that led many to conclude that extricating the United States from Vietnam was imperative.<sup>142</sup>

The White House, however, sought to discredit the antiwar movement by attacking it. In November, Aiken responded to these attacks against antiwar demonstrations and statements.<sup>143</sup> The administration contended that displays of disunity in the United States served to make the North Vietnamese more apt to continue the war in an attempt to outlast the will of the American people to continue the struggle.<sup>144</sup> Aiken, however, made it clear that he believed that bombing had more of an effect on the will of the North Vietnamese to fight than had the antiwar movement and he laid the blame for the war at the White House door. In a series of biting comments, the Vermont Senator said, "Congress has given the President everything he has asked for to carry on the war in Vietnam, if the results have not been successful it would appear to be the judgment of the administration that is at fault. To imply that those who question the judgment of the President may not be wholly loyal to their country would seem to me to be hitting below the belt. I can tell Johnson how to get unity. Just let somebody drop bombs on Silver Spring, Md., and Falls Church, Va., and he will get unity. The American people then would feel just about as I imagine the people of Hanoi and Haiphong feel."<sup>145</sup> Aiken, like most Americans, did not condone the behavior of those antiwar activists that resorted to violent tactics but he did not want the actions of a decided minority

---

<sup>142</sup> Herring, p. 173.

<sup>143</sup> The U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, had said that domestic dissent had acted to "encourage the North Vietnamese to hold on." Vice-president Humphrey said that the greatest need was "support by the American people" which would "give a clear, unmistakable signal to our adversary and thereby shorten the war." *The Burlington Free Press*, (November 15, 1967). Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 6, Folder 1.

<sup>144</sup> Although this has remained a controversial issue, it is almost certain that antiwar demonstrations in the United States gave Hanoi the hope that it could win a war of attrition because of the continued erosion of popular support for the war. The will of the North Vietnamese may have, however, been just as powerful if no antiwar movement had existed in the United States. Herring, p. 173.

<sup>145</sup> *The Burlington Free Press*, (November 15, 1967). Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 6, Folder 1.

of the antiwar movement to taint the opinions of men like him. As the defeat of the Johnson administration remained, in Aiken's eyes, the only way to achieve a possible de-escalation of the war, the Vermont Republican also wanted the nation to continue to focus its attention on the current policies of the United States and their practitioners in the White House.

On November 30, 1967, in a clear demonstration of the level of opposition to Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam policies in the U.S. Senate, as well as the Democratic Party, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota declared his intention to run against the President in five or six Democratic primaries in 1968. McCarthy stated that he intended to run against Johnson because of his fear that the administration intended to escalate the war even further while offering no credible or realistic negotiating position. McCarthy said that he was "concerned that the administration seems to have set no limit to the price, which it's willing to pay for a military victory."<sup>146</sup> Initially the Senator's candidacy seemed to pose little threat to Johnson, as indicated by a poll that showed McCarthy behind the President by 63-17 percent nationwide.<sup>147</sup> In fact, most commentators believed that McCarthy was little more than a stalking horse for Robert Kennedy, there to test the viability of challenging Johnson in order to determine whether it was worthwhile for Kennedy to risk his political future by entering the campaign. McCarthy himself did not rule out a Kennedy entry into the race while volunteering that Johnson remained the front runner for the Democratic nomination. The Minnesota Democrat's main goal, it seemed, was to pressure the administration toward a negotiated settlement to the conflict but within four months Lyndon Johnson, under increasing pressure from McCarthy and Kennedy, would withdraw from the race.

At the end of 1967, George Aiken did not see any way that the Johnson administration could end the war in Vietnam. Aiken summed up the frustration of many Americans when he commented that the United States could defeat the Vietcong "if they'd fight by our rules but they won't."<sup>148</sup> Although Aiken continued to believe that an American presence was needed in Southeast Asia, he despaired over the continuing loss of life and widespread destruction caused by the war. As far as Aiken was concerned, Johnson's continued occupation of the White House made a peace settlement unlikely. In a December 14

<sup>146</sup> *The New York Times*, (December 1, 1967), sect. 1, p. 40, col. 5.

<sup>147</sup> "Democrats: McCarthy or McCoy?," *Newsweek*, December 11, 1967, p. 30.

<sup>148</sup> *St. Johnsbury Caledonian - Record*, (December 14, 1967.) Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 6, Folder 1.

speech, he said “there is little hope of ending the Vietnam war. It will end when the President thinks it has gone far enough. He wants Ho Chi Minh to sit down, but he won’t sit down.”<sup>149</sup> Aiken had lost all faith in Lyndon Johnson’s ability to end the conflict. At the beginning of 1967 he had continued to try to influence the administration through gentle persuasion but he became increasingly bitter throughout the course of the year. As the Presidential election year of 1968 approached, Aiken pressed for a change in the White House. No longer content to criticize Vietnam policies in a non-political manner, Aiken increasingly sought to paint the deficiencies in the administration’s foreign policy as a partisan issue, one to be exploited by the Republican Presidential nominee in 1968.

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *BALLOT BOX DISSENT*

By 1968 George Aiken had seen enough of the Johnson Administration. He began to speak more forcefully of the need to replace Lyndon Johnson in the White House and he worked to insure this would occur. Aiken also threw his support, to varying degrees, to any candidate, Democrat or Republican, that shared his view that the United States should seek to deescalate the war in Vietnam. Aiken also sought to insure that the Republican Party offered a credible and peaceful alternative to U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. Aiken believed that the GOP would be well served to campaign as the party that could offer the American people a chance to end the war. To this end, he pressured the party, through public comments and offers of support to liberal candidates such as George Romney and Nelson Rockefeller, to adopt a stance much less hawkish than that offered by the Johnson Administration.

On the opening day of the 1968 legislative session, Aiken rose in the Senate to deliver an uncharacteristically bitter attack on the Johnson Administration and its conduct of the war in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> As the speech was the first major attack on the White House by a member of Congress in the New Year, it garnered widespread attention. Aiken also broke his long-standing practice of remaining silent in the opening days of a legislative session. The speech represented the first time in Aiken's twenty-seven years in the Senate that the Vermonter felt the need and urgency to comment on the state of the Union.<sup>2</sup>

Aiken stressed at the outset of his speech his hope that Vietnam would be a central issue in the upcoming presidential election. He accused the Johnson Administration of recklessness in its public commentary on the progress of the war in Southeast Asia. Aiken said that "words constitute much of the substance of both politics and diplomacy, and we have so trifled with words to date that we have managed in our clumsiness to endanger the peace of the world and to embitter our society at home in a manner not

---

<sup>1</sup> Murray Marder of the *Washington Post* highlighted the tone of the speech. He wrote that although Aiken had "stood in the ranks of Senate 'doves' on the war, he usually couches his criticism in wry good humour. Yesterday his tone was of grieved dismay as he delivered the first full-fledged attack in this new session on the Johnson Administration's foreign policy." *The Washington Post*, (January 20, 1968). Aiken Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Crate 39, Box 7, Folder 22.

<sup>2</sup> Aiken began the speech by explaining why he had decided to state his views on the state of the Nation by declaring that "this is a privilege I have foregone in the past, because usually I have felt that the Union's state was not so bad as its detractors would have it, nor as good as those in office wanted to make it out to be. But this year, the state of the Union is so clearly bad that for the first time in my twenty-seven years as a Senator, I feel compelled to stand on my privilege." *Congressional Record - Senate*, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 369.

seen in a century.”<sup>3</sup> Aiken also reacted to President Johnson’s remark, made in a speech in December, that those who called for scaling back the U.S. presence in Vietnam were advocating a cut and run approach to American foreign policy. In order to give credence and respectability to those who voiced their dissent, Aiken once again rose to their defense by stating his opinion that the real political issue rested between those who wished to begin the process of disengaging the United States from an increasingly expensive, in money and manpower, policy of war and those who clung to the hope of achieving a decisive military victory.

Aiken discounted the idea of the United States winning the war militarily because he believed that the problem in Southeast Asia was a political one. Aiken said that he had “maintained for many months that we have made a huge military commitment in that part of the world simply because we did not have the wit, the imagination or the courage to devise a political strategy to suit a political problem. So we decided to use our military strength to camouflage our political ineptitude. I devoutly hope that this year will see an explicit recognition of this fact and a genuine effort to solve a political issue by political means.”<sup>4</sup> The Vermont Republican hoped that the administration would give consideration to his idea, first articulated in October 1966, that the United States declare victory in Vietnam and begin the process of reducing the American commitment to the area. Aiken said that because the United States had propped up the Saigon regime for so many years, South Vietnamese leaders no longer believed that it was in their best interests to seek peace. As long as the United States continued to feed South Vietnam’s government with military and financial aid, Aiken felt that peace would remain elusive.<sup>5</sup>

Aiken also believed that continued American bombing of North Vietnam remained a further obstacle to peace. The persistent aerial attacks had not, as the White House hoped, moved Hanoi closer to seeking peace but had rather stiffened their resolve by bringing the North Vietnamese people closer together in a determined effort to resist the attacks by the United States. Aiken traced the increasing ferocity of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 370.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Aiken contended that the people of South Vietnam had become increasingly disenchanted with their government and support for it had dwindled as a result. He said that “the progressive assumption of responsibility by Americans for the affairs of government in South Vietnam, particularly for the tragic ‘pacification’ campaign, can only weaken the appeal of the South Vietnamese authorities among those to whom nationalism is what the fight is all about”. Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 370.

bombing assault to the fact that the Johnson Administration had trapped itself through its own public statements. In a direct and vigorous attack on the administration's foreign policy Aiken said,

I am convinced that the administration has been unable to devise a political strategy for demilitarizing our foreign policy in Southeast Asia largely because it has persuaded itself of the possibility of something called an 'important victory for world communism' in Vietnam. Having designated the war as a war against 'world communism' we must now produce a victory over an elusive and almost indefinable enemy. The administration has, in short, become the prisoner of its own bad rhetoric. Therefore, our recourse now is to beat into submission a symbol of 'world communism', in this case the little country of North Vietnam, thereby putting the fear of American military might in the hearts of 800 million Red Chinese and 250 million Russians, and possibly Fidel Castro, as well. It requires an act of invention to make out of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong a monstrous monolithic enemy capable of winning a worldwide victory for something even more monolithic called 'world communism'.<sup>6</sup>

As he had done in previous speeches, Aiken said that nationalism and not communism remained the driving force behind the resistance of the North Vietnamese and their Vietcong counterparts in South Vietnam. Aiken recognized that a large number of Vietnamese nationalists were communists as well but he scoffed at the notion that the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong were an integral part of a unified and monolithic worldwide communist enemy. The Republican Senator termed it a "destructive fantasy", one that ignored the fact that North Vietnam had for hundreds of years been a traditional enemy of China. Aiken charged that the White House had "taken official recourse to this fantasy because the administration has had to create a monolithic enemy to justify its refusal to admit past mistakes", saying further that "by clinging to its inventions the administration is simply duping Americans at home and undermining credibility abroad in the sincerity and purposes and the efficiency of our diplomacy."

Aiken also lamented the state of American politics during his speech. He stated that it had deteriorated to such an extent that the malaise that he viewed as evident in the country could be directly attributed to it. The Vermonter said that "a man's image has become so much more important than the substance of his thoughts and ideas that we have elevated a cult of personality far above any real debate of the issues".<sup>8</sup> At

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Aiken had repeated his call for a bombing halt in early January. Aiken said that the recent declaration from Hanoi that peace talks will begin if the United States halted its bombing represented an important change from its prior stance of saying that peace talks would or could begin in such an atmosphere. Aiken said that "the sooner we halt it, the sooner we'll find out who really wants peace. A real question is whether we're going to be willing to sit down to peace talks if the north is willing. Our conditions so far amount for all intents and purposes to unconditional surrender." *The Rutland Herald* (January 16, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 22, Folder 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 370-371.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.



the end of his speech Aiken once again returned to this topic saying "I cannot believe that in the final act we will so elevate the cult of personalities above the debate of issues as to make a mockery out of this, the most precious of our democratic processes. I still have faith that candidates will come forward from both parties to 'talk sense to the American people' as the late Adlai Stevenson tried in vain to do. When politics becomes dangerous nonsense, when the 'medium is the message' as some would have it, we will have entered a new Dark Age."<sup>9</sup> Although Aiken remained a loyal Republican, he wanted both parties to nominate candidates who would attempt to change the direction of American policy in Southeast Asia. Aiken stated that "what is important is that whoever occupies the White House after the next election, regardless of party, be a man capable of articulating persuasively a role for the United States, both in the Pacific and the Atlantic, that is acceptable at home and abroad."<sup>10</sup>

Aiken realized that his criticism of the Johnson White House and its policies in Vietnam would be all for naught if both parties nominated hawkish candidates for President. In speeches and public comments made in late 1967, Aiken had revealed that he believed that the only way to change the course of the war and to bring about peace was to replace Johnson as President with someone who sympathized with the war's critics. In January of 1968 Aiken must have been disturbed by the possibility of a presidential race between hawks Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson.

Aiken had no doubt that Johnson would be the Democratic standard bearer in 1968. In an interview given two days after his Senate address Aiken, in response to a question regarding whether he could foresee any condition under which the President would not run again, said "not now. I can't see those circumstances now. I think that would be the surprise of the year. I mean, the generation if he didn't run."<sup>11</sup> Aiken knew the President well and was convinced that Johnson would not abdicate the Presidency. He knew as well that Johnson's popularity, which had ebbed to the lowest point of his Presidency in

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370. Aiken always maintained that he wished every President success, regardless of party affiliation, because their success would be the country's success. He also did not regard himself as a partisan Republican, one that would automatically side with his party on every issue. After retiring Aiken said, regarding his party ties, that he "was not a strong party man. I wouldn't agree to everything that the leadership of the party decided upon. And that's why I never ran for high office in the ranks after I got to Washington. Charles T. Morrissey and D. Gregory Sanford, *That Man From Vermont: George David Aiken, An Oral History Memoir* (Burlington, Vermont, 1981), p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> *Transcript of Opinion - Washington program*, p. 12, Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 10, Folder 2.

October of 1967, had risen substantially by the beginning of 1968.<sup>12</sup> Although Eugene McCarthy had declared his intention to challenge Johnson in the New Hampshire primary, the Minnesota Democrat was largely ignored by the press and the public throughout the early part of 1968. It seemed that Johnson would encounter little opposition in a campaign for the Democratic nomination, a fact that Aiken was well aware of.

For those calling for an end to the hostilities in Southeast Asia, the race for the Republican Presidential nomination had become, by January of 1968, equally disheartening. By that time former Vice-President Richard Nixon had firmly assumed the mantle of front runner in the race to challenge Johnson for the Presidency. Nixon had not demonstrated any inclination to soften what had been an ardently aggressive stance on Vietnam. In fact, the other contenders for the nomination, Governors George Romney of Michigan, Ronald Reagan of California and Nelson Rockefeller of New York, had not explicitly called for an end to hostilities in Vietnam. Romney and Rockefeller were, however, considered members of the liberal wing of the Republican Party, making them closer to Aiken in ideology. For that reason, Aiken believed they would be more open to seeking an end to the war, thus he remained more inclined to support their candidacies rather than those of Nixon and Reagan, men more akin to the conservative wing of the GOP.

Aiken had clashed with members of his own party over Vietnam as far back as 1965. In particular Aiken had reacted angrily to hawkish statements made by Nixon and other party leaders. Aiken believed that pressure exerted on the President by Republicans contributed to the White House policy of escalation in Southeast Asia. He also lamented the possibility that the GOP would assume the mantle of war party because of their aggressive stance on the conflict. For this reason Aiken, although not openly a supporter of Romney, talked highly of the Michigan Governor's abilities and chances in the upcoming New Hampshire primary during his January 21 appearance on *Opinion - Washington*.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Johnson's personal approval rating had risen from its low of 38% in October to 46% by the end of December, roughly the same level that he enjoyed at the beginning of 1967. The apparent progress of the war in Vietnam and the rosy predictions emanating from the White House regarding the military situation had borne fruition in stabilizing and elevating Johnson's popularity. All of the positive rhetoric from the Johnson Administration would, however, cause severe problems for the President after the onslaught of the Tet Offensive and the realization by Americans that the end of the war was not as close as they were led to believe. *The New York Times* (December 31, 1967), sect. 1, p. 1, cols. 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding New Hampshire Aiken said "At the present time, it looks as though Vice President Nixon is in the lead for the Republican nomination in New Hampshire, and president Johnson would be the favoured candidate among the Democrats, but I will say this, I think that Governor Romney will get more votes than are anticipated by his opposition at this time, but somebody might go into the New

Within the liberal wing of the Republican Party, however, Nelson Rockefeller remained the first choice for the GOP Presidential nomination. Throughout 1967, the New York Governor had resisted any and all calls to declare his candidacy for the Presidency. In his stead, Rockefeller had thrown his resources and support behind the campaign of George Romney. Unwilling to commit himself to the race, Rockefeller regarded Romney as the best choice for Republicans largely because the New Yorker believed Romney shared many of his beliefs on issues such as civil rights and the need for an able and activist government that could, if managed correctly, make a difference in people's lives.<sup>14</sup> Nixon, however, struck Rockefeller as an able and formidable political opponent but one who the Governor believed was not suited or fit to assume the task of running the country.

In order to block Nixon's nomination, Rockefeller lent support to Romney by placing speechwriters and other aides such as Henry Kissinger at the Michigan Governor's disposal. Rockefeller also used his considerable influence as the leader of the progressive wing of the GOP to dissuade other liberal minded Republicans such as Senators Charles Percy of Illinois and Mark Hatfield of Oregon as well as New York City Mayor John Lindsay from seeking the nomination, even as the Romney campaign began to falter in 1967.<sup>15</sup> As a result when, by January of 1968, Nixon was out polling Romney by a six to one margin in the crucial first primary of New Hampshire, Rockefeller's machinations meant that no liberal Republican, other than himself, was available to pick up the fight against the former Vice President. The pressure once again centered on the reluctant Nelson Rockefeller. It had become apparent to progressive Republicans that Romney would not be able to thwart Nixon's drive to the nomination. Rockefeller was the only

---

Hampshire Primary that would cut into President Johnson seriously." Aiken commented further on Romney, outlining why he believed the Michigan Governor would fare well in the primary. He said that "he is campaigning for votes up there, and he makes a very good impression on the people he meets. I wouldn't say they have as yet made up their minds as to how they are going to vote." Transcript of *Opinion - Washington*, pp. 11-12, Aiken Papers, Crate 48, Box 10, Folder 2. Aiken's prescient view that Johnson could be hurt revealed two things about his thinking. The first is Aiken's sincere desire that a peace candidate emerge within Democratic Party ranks to challenge Johnson. Secondly, Aiken obviously did not take the candidacy of Eugene McCarthy very seriously. Aiken believed that McCarthy was little more than a stalking horse for the much stronger candidacy, in his view, of Robert Kennedy.

<sup>14</sup> Theodore H. White. *The Making of the President - 1968* (New York, 1969), p. 228.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Romney's campaign faltered for a variety of reasons but his main problem lay in the fact that as the front runner for the nomination the Michigan Governor remained the focal point of press attention throughout much of 1967. Unfortunately for Romney, his first extended exposure to national attention occurred before he had adequately prepared himself to deal with a variety of issues, notably Vietnam. Although Romney viewed himself as a dove on Vietnam, his inexperience in foreign affairs led him to have Rockefeller approve his first major address on Vietnam. Rockefeller at this time remained quite resolute in his belief that the United States must stand firm in Vietnam. Romney's speech, therefore, after revisions by Rockefeller and his staff, allowed Lyndon Johnson to state publicly that he and the Republican were largely in agreement on Vietnam, a ploy that destroyed any effort by Romney to distinguish himself from the President on Southeast Asia. When Romney sought to change his stance he uttered the infamous statement to the effect that he had been brainwashed by American officials while on a tour of Vietnam, thereby leading him to take a hawkish stance on Vietnam. Given great play in the media, this statement made Romney seem naive and unfit for the Presidency, and doomed his effort to wrest the nomination from Nixon. Romney

candidate who could prevent a Nixon victory and the effort to get the New York Governor to declare his candidacy consumed the liberal wing of the Republican Party for the first four months of 1968.<sup>16</sup>

On February 24 at a fund raising event in Detroit on behalf of Romney, Rockefeller, after being pressed by reporters, finally conceded that he would run for president if he were drafted by the Republican National Convention.<sup>17</sup> A firestorm of national attention focused on Rockefeller and his apparent change of heart. Romney, overshadowed and facing the prospect of a crushing and demoralizing defeat in New Hampshire, withdrew from the race three days after Rockefeller's statement. Now, more than ever, liberal Republicans rested their Presidential hopes on the New York Governor.

In a series of meetings and consultations in late February and early March Rockefeller sought advice and counsel from various members of the GOP's progressive wing, including George Aiken. Aiken had already made it clear in interviews and public statements that he believed that Rockefeller would make the strongest Republican candidate for President. Aiken supported Rockefeller for two reasons. First, he wanted a liberal Republican as the GOP standard bearer for President. Secondly, he wanted to support the strongest liberal Republican candidate and he was well aware that polls demonstrated that Rockefeller led all other potential Republicans in head to head matches with President Johnson.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Rockefeller's main appeal lay in the strength of his polling numbers. After Nixon's decisive victory in New Hampshire, where he garnered roughly 80% of the vote to Rockefeller's write in total of 13%, Rockefeller supporters continued to stress the fact that the New Yorker consistently scored better than Nixon in poll results measuring a contest against President Johnson.

In a meeting with seventeen Republican Senators on March 19, Rockefeller gave the impression that he would announce his intention to run. In a *New York Times* account of the meeting, R.W. Apple Jr. indicated that although fifteen of the thirty-six GOP Senators were leaning towards supporting Rockefeller, a firm base of hard core support existed. Eight Senators were considered firmly in

---

implored Rockefeller to take up the liberal Republican standard and still the New Yorker demurred, continuing to beseech Romney to continue the fight. White, pp. 56-61.

<sup>16</sup> White, p. 229.

<sup>17</sup> *The New York Times* (February 25, 1968), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>18</sup> In a national survey of party leaders and other observers, Rockefeller scored a decisive victory over Johnson, 378 electoral votes to 100, with George Wallace carrying 60. The results for the other three Republican contenders were as follows: Johnson 301, Nixon 210, Wallace 27; Johnson 416, Romney 62, Wallace 60; Johnson 413, Reagan 98, Wallace 27. *The New York Times* (January 1, 1968), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 5.

Rockefeller's camp, Aiken, Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, Clifford Case of New Jersey, Jacob Javits of New York, John Sherman Cooper and Thurston Morton of Kentucky, Mark Hatfield of Oregon and Edward Brooke of Massachusetts.<sup>19</sup> Although Rockefeller had not taken a position against the war, and had resisted a call to do so at the meeting, these men believed that he could be more easily convinced to take a dovish stand on the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

In a press conference two days later, in a move that stunned the Senators he had met with as well as the nation, Rockefeller told a gathering of 300 newsmen from around the country that he would not be a candidate for the Presidency in 1968. The buildup by the press had lent the proceedings an air of inevitability, as everyone fully expected Rockefeller to announce his intention to run. The New York Governor declared, however, that he had "decided today to reiterate unequivocally that I am not a candidate campaigning directly or indirectly for the Presidency of the United States."<sup>21</sup> Rockefeller left open only the slimmest possibility of becoming a candidate, stating that he would be open to a draft at the GOP convention only if it constituted a majority of the assembled delegates. With this announcement, the New York Governor had destroyed the hopes of thousands of like minded Republican politicians and allies throughout the country. Rockefeller's refusal to enter the race also removed the last barrier on the road to the GOP nomination for Richard Nixon. Aiken's hope for a Republican candidate with designs for peace in Vietnam seemed to have been dashed. Although for many Republicans other issues such as the performance of the economy and crime overshadowed Vietnam, the conflict in Southeast Asia remained the preeminent concern of George Aiken. Richard Nixon, well aware of the divisive and complex nature of Vietnam as a campaign issue, had done his best to avoid stating a specific policy for Southeast Asia.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *The New York Times* (March 20, 1968), sect. 1, p. 31, cols. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> An example of liberal Republican belief that Rockefeller would come out against the war occurred the very same day that the Senators were meeting. John Lindsay was asked, following a speech that praised resistance to the war, why he believed that Rockefeller was opposed to the war when the New Yorker had so far refused to offer his thoughts on the issue. Lindsay replied, "Nelson Rockefeller is going to run and win. I have faith in his intelligence and integrity. I should be very surprised if Governor Rockefeller did not come out with a sensible and clear resolution of the Vietnam War." *The New York Times* (March 20, 1968), sect. 1, p. 31, cols. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in White, p. 231. According to White, Rockefeller was reluctant to make the race for a number of reasons. After his attempt in 1964 to wrest the nomination from Barry Goldwater and his conservative forces, Rockefeller was extremely reluctant to engage in another bruising series of primary fights. Rockefeller had also endured nine campaigns, including primaries and bond issues, in the past ten years and his spirit for doing battle was at a low ebb. Rockefeller had also been through a very public divorce in 1962 and had married a much younger woman in 1963 under similar public circumstances. His new wife had been subject to much abuse and attack in the 1964 campaign and the Governor was reluctant to expose her to that once more. Lastly, Rockefeller, as White writes, seemed to have accepted the notion that he was not going to be President and he remained content to perform his duties as Governor of New York. White, pp. 227-228.

<sup>22</sup> White, p. 148.

Aiken feared, however, that Nixon, a product of the conservative wing of the GOP, would continue the present policy of trying to achieve a military solution to Vietnam. In Aiken's view, therefore, by April of 1968 the Republicans seemed to be on the verge of nominating a candidate with aggressive notions of how Vietnam policy should be conducted. The situation in the Democratic Party, however, appeared to be quite different.

At the beginning of the year, Lyndon Johnson appeared to have the Democratic nomination all but wrapped up. For all the criticism of the President within his own party only one challenger, Eugene McCarthy, had emerged to confront Johnson in the Democratic primaries. The man Johnson feared the most, Robert Kennedy, had so far declined to declare his candidacy. After much agonizing, Kennedy had decided that he could not defeat Johnson's bid to win the nomination. The New York Senator also believed that fighting Johnson in the primaries would split the party, thereby hurting Democratic candidates around the country and paving the way for a Republican presidential victory in November.<sup>23</sup> In a background breakfast with Washington reporters on January 30, Kennedy had stated that he could not conceive of "any foreseeable circumstances" under which he would declare his candidacy.<sup>24</sup> Kennedy's decision, combined with polls revealing that Johnson led McCarthy 71% to 18% among Democrats nationwide, boded extremely well for the President.<sup>25</sup> The Tet Offensive, however, changed the political landscape entirely within the Democratic Party.

On January 31, 1968, North Vietnam and its Vietcong allies launched a series of offensive military operations on the second day of the traditional Vietnamese New Year holiday Tet. Attacks were staged against thirty-six of forty-four provincial capitals, sixty-four district capitals, numerous villages and hamlets as well as five of the six major cities of South Vietnam.<sup>26</sup> In the most daring raid of the attack, Vietcong commandos attacked the supposedly impregnable American Embassy in Saigon. While the raid was only a minor episode in the large scale offensive, the image of American soldiers pinned down for over six hours in their own Embassy compound and broadcast on the evening news, brought home the

---

<sup>23</sup> Jules Witcover, *85 Days: The Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy* (New York, 1988), pp. 37-44. Some of Kennedy's staff members urged the Senator to make the fight on the principle that the war had to be brought to a conclusion. Kennedy, however, believed that a losing campaign would destroy his standing in the party and would eliminate any future chance of occupying the White House.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *Robert Kennedy And His Times* (Boston, 1978), p. 901.

<sup>26</sup> George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1986), p. 189.

widespread chaos that ensued in the attack's first moments.<sup>27</sup> These initial images, revealing such a disturbing level of confusion in South Vietnam, came as a great shock to millions of Americans. The public had been led to believe, through repeated statements of progress issued by the Johnson Administration, that the war was being won. The televised accounts of the brutal battles being waged in Vietnam gave the lie to all of the optimistic year-end reports of 1967 and widened an already significant White House credibility gap.

Although it quickly became clear to military officials that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong had suffered a grievous defeat during the Tet Offensive, one that they would never fully recover from in terms of manpower, the psychological repercussions of the battles signified a major defeat for American policymakers.<sup>28</sup> The administration, as well as military officials in South Vietnam, quickly issued statements that claimed the North Vietnamese and Vietcong had suffered an enormous defeat. For many Americans, however, these claims did not correspond to the images they were being bombarded with. Photographs and television footage of the Saigon police chief summarily executing a Vietcong prisoner revealed a disturbing depth of lawlessness in South Vietnam.<sup>29</sup> George Aiken echoed the sentiments of many Americans when he said, "If this is a failure, I hope the Vietcong never have a major success."<sup>30</sup>

The Tet Offensive also had a significant effect on the behaviour and beliefs of a number of U.S. Senators. Those Senators, such as Aiken, who had long been outspoken critics of Johnson's policies, continued to speak out. More disturbing for the administration was the fact that a number of Senators who had previously supported the White House or had refrained from voicing their private doubts now began to speak out as well. Republican Senator Thurston Morton, in an interview only two weeks after the offensive had begun, declared that the number of Senators expressing dovish views had expanded dramatically since the beginning of 1967. Morton claimed that only ten Senators would have been considered doves at the beginning of the previous year. By the middle of February 1968 that number had

---

<sup>27</sup> The attack on the Embassy provided dramatic television footage as well as print photographs. *The New York Times* of January 31 had on its front page a photo of three military policemen crouching for cover behind a cement wall while two American soldiers lay dead beside them. *Newsweek* ran a similar photo on the cover of its February 12 issue.

<sup>28</sup> The North Vietnamese and Vietcong may have suffered as many as 40,000 deaths during the fighting. The Vietcong forces were decimated to a large extent and would never completely recover their full strength. The Americans, meanwhile, suffered 1,100 battle deaths while their South Vietnamese allies lost 2,300 soldiers during the assault. Herring, p. 191.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head eds., *The Tet Offensive* (Westport, Conn. and London, 1996), p. 24.

risen to twenty-five, with another sixteen Senators leaning in that direction. This contrasted with thirty-six firm supporters of U.S. policy and a further twenty-three sympathetic to that camp.<sup>31</sup>

The credibility gap that existed among the general populace was also apparent in Congress. A number of people in Congress no longer trusted the administration's claim of progress in the war. Many had begun to have serious doubts in the previous year. The Tet Offensive, therefore, proved to be the last straw for those who believed that serious discrepancies existed between White House accounts and the apparent realities of the situation in Vietnam. They viewed Tet as clear evidence that U.S. policy in Vietnam was failing and that administration claims that the war's end was drawing near were merely wishful thinking.<sup>32</sup> Even those Senators who continued to support the administration did so with much less vigour. As proof of this, no one in the Senate rose to the defense of the White House following a particularly harsh denunciation of U.S. policy by Robert Kennedy, something that would not have occurred in previous years.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Administration continued to stress publicly that the enemy had suffered a grave defeat, the President and his advisers in the White House were also shocked and dismayed by the scope of the offensive. Johnson himself had not believed it possible that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong had the capability to launch attacks against the cities of South Vietnam.<sup>34</sup> Johnson's initial reaction was to insure that United States forces hold the line in South Vietnam. To this end he advised the U.S. Commander in Vietnam, William Westmoreland, that if reinforcements were needed they would be sent. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle Wheeler, used Johnson's pledge as a springboard to force the administration to confront decisions which the military believed had been delayed for too long. The primary decision revolved around mobilizing the army reserves, something Wheeler believed should have

<sup>31</sup> *The New York Times* (February 12, 1968), sect. 1, p. 6, col. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Walter A. Zelman, *Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor, 1973), pp.314-318.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy's speech, before a book and author luncheon in Chicago, was a broad indictment of U.S. policy in Vietnam. Kennedy stated that the "history of conflict among nations does not record another such lengthy and consistent chronicle of error" as that brought about by the French and the United States in Vietnam. Kennedy said that the attacks had "demonstrated despite all our reports of progress, of government strength and enemy weakness, that half a million American soldiers with 700,000 Vietnamese allies, with total command of the air, total command of the sea, backed by huge resources and the most modern weapons, are unable to secure even a single city from the attacks of an enemy whose total strength is about 250,000." Kennedy said that any prospect of a victory was an illusion, saying that "a total military victory is not within sight or around the corner, that, in fact, it is probably beyond our grasp; and that the effort to win such a victory will only result in the further slaughter of thousands of innocent and helpless people-a slaughter which will forever rest on our national conscience." *The New York Times* (February 9, 1968), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 2 and p. 12, cols. 3-7.

<sup>34</sup> Herring, p. 192, and Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, 1983), p. 547.



been initiated long before February 1968.<sup>35</sup> Wheeler traveled to Vietnam on February 23 and he and Westmoreland drew up a massive troop request designed to meet military requirements in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world.<sup>36</sup> It was also designed to force the President's hand regarding calling up the army reserves.

In a grim report, Wheeler requested an additional 206,000 troops, roughly half of whom would be deployed in Vietnam by the end of 1968. The report came as a shock to a government already experiencing a grave crisis. Johnson ordered his new Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, to consider whether or not to grant the request. Clifford used the opportunity to initiate a full reevaluation of Vietnam policy at the highest levels of government, a process that allowed those with grave doubts about the direction of U.S. policy a chance to voice their ever increasing dissent in a firm and forthright manner.<sup>37</sup>

Rumours of an impending administration debate concerning a massive troop increase began to quickly filter up to Capitol Hill. On February 26, Majority Leader Mansfield spoke in the Senate to suggest that the United States should listen seriously to suggestions by United Nations Secretary General U Thant that North Vietnam would be willing to begin peace negotiations after an American bombing halt. Aiken followed the Montana Democrat in order to voice his concerns about a possible troop increase. Aiken said that "we should know that the addition of 100,000 men to our fighting forces in Southeast Asia will not go very far toward bringing any war to a successful military conclusion. In my opinion, the addition of 100,000 men is only a drop in the bucket if it is the determination of the President and the administration to bring about a military victory."<sup>38</sup> Aiken also returned to his theme of trying to alert the American people to the fact that a military victory could only be achieved by a total war effort, issuing a warning about the sacrifices needed to achieve such a result. Aiken commented, "As I said on the floor a couple of years ago, if we are going to fight an all-out war in Asia, we must adopt those rules and regulations that go with all-out war. That means universal conscription. It means a big increase in taxes. It means wage and price controls."<sup>39</sup> The Vermont Senator ended his prepared remarks by saying that he hoped nobody

---

<sup>35</sup> Johnson Library, Earle Wheeler interview, August 21, 1969, pp. 19-20.

<sup>36</sup> Karnow, p. 551.

<sup>37</sup> Herring, pp. 195-196.

<sup>38</sup> Congressional Record – Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 4090.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

would be "fooled by the request for 100,000 more men in Asia if we have the idea of a complete military victory in our minds. I would suggest that, instead of 100,000, perhaps another cipher be added to that figure – and not before the '1'."<sup>40</sup>

In an interview given after the speech Aiken made it clear that he no longer believed that Lyndon Johnson could end the war, even if the President sincerely wished to do so.<sup>41</sup> Aiken's speech, therefore, was an attempt to link an increase in the number of troops with severe consequences for the American people. The Vermont Republican wanted to make it as difficult and unpopular as possible for the administration to announce another escalation of the conflict. Aiken believed that as long as Johnson remained President the chances of achieving a peace settlement remained extremely slim. It remained imperative for Johnson to be replaced as President but in the meantime Aiken was afraid that the White House would continue to expand the conflict, making it even more difficult for Johnson's successor to extricate the United States from the war in Vietnam.<sup>42</sup> Aiken had also realized by this point that the Senate could not change U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, only a new President in the White House could effect a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Relations between the White House and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were extremely strained by February 1968. The SFRC, under Chairman Fulbright's impetus, had undertaken a full-scale review of the Tonkin Gulf attacks of August 1964. Fulbright wanted to determine if the attacks had actually occurred, calling former Defense Secretary McNamara in front of the committee for two days of grueling and often contentious testimony. The level of distrust between Fulbright and the White House was amply demonstrated by a dispute that erupted prior to McNamara's testimony regarding the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. Fulbright had written a letter, on behalf of the committee, asking whether the White House had any plans to use tactical nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia. Secretary of State Dean

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *The Rutland Herald* (February 27, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 8, Folder 1.

<sup>42</sup> Aiken also wanted to test the peaceful intentions of the North Vietnamese and their allies by instituting a bombing pause. Aiken also had another reason for wanting to offer this bombing pause to North Vietnam; he wanted the atmosphere for peace to be as strong as possible in anticipation of Johnson being replaced as President. A bombing pause would serve to extricate the United States from its role as the villain in world opinion. Aiken said, in an exchange with William Fulbright and Mike Mansfield following his speech, that "I want to reiterate that I do not know, and I do not know of anyone else who knows, whether a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam would result in peace efforts within a reasonable time or not; but we should know that if the bombing ceases, in view of what other countries have said, and there is no honest move toward peace on the part of Russia, China, or Vietnam, then we could really expect a change in world opinion, which up to now has largely held the United States responsible for the wartime conditions which have existed in that part of the world." *Congressional Record – Senate*, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 4091.

Rusk had written a brusque reply calling the raising of the matter irresponsible and a disservice to the nation.<sup>43</sup> Aiken defended Fulbright by telling reporters that the Rusk letter was "about as irresponsible as General Wheeler's statement that he wouldn't use nuclear weapons unless we begin to get the worst of it in the battle of Khe Sahn", saying further, "maybe we need some new faces downtown."<sup>44</sup> The exchange highlighted the apprehension felt by many Senators and the degree to which some worried that the next step in the escalation of the war was a nuclear attack.

Another component of the mistrust between the SFRC and the White House was the refusal of Secretary Rusk to appear before the committee in open session. Fulbright had become increasingly agitated by Rusk's willingness to appear on television programs like *Meet The Press*, forums that the Chairman believed could be controlled and dictated by the administration. The committee had been discussing whether to attempt to force Rusk to testify in open session since October of 1967, while Rusk had insisted that he would testify in Executive session only.<sup>45</sup> After much consideration, the committee, on February 7, 1968, finally voted 8-4 to send President Johnson a letter asking him to direct the Secretary to testify in open session. Johnson relented and told Rusk that he would have to go in front of the television cameras and defend the administration's policies.<sup>46</sup>

The day before Rusk's first appearance in front of the committee on March 11, *The New York Times* had broken the story of the 206,000 troop request in a front-page report. The article created another firestorm of controversy on Capitol Hill, as members demanded an explanation from the White House while insisting that Congress must share in any decision to further expand the conflict.<sup>47</sup> Rusk's appearance, while not as dramatic as those of the 1966 SFRC hearings, did generate a significant amount of press attention and were carried live on television by CBS. Rusk steadfastly defended the

---

<sup>43</sup> *The New York Times* (February 16, 1968), sect. 1, p. 2, col. 4. Rusk wrote, "As George Christian (the Presidential Press Secretary) said yesterday in response to a question about whether the President had received a request to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam under certain circumstances: I think all of you know that decisions of this nature rest with the President. The President had considered no decision of this nature. I might add that irresponsible discussion and speculation are a disservice to the country, and I don't intend to say anything more about the subject."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Aiken favoured having Rusk testify in Executive session first, telling the committee on October 31, 1967, that after the session the committee could decide "whether administration officials should be required to tell their story to the public or not. I would rather get some information from him than to embarrass him publicly, and I haven't had any direct information since last spring from any of the Executive branch, and I think we should be informed even if we have to get the information in Executive Session." Quoted in William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships - Part IV: July 1965 - January 1968* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1995), p. 910.

<sup>46</sup> Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 471.

<sup>47</sup> Herring, p. 201.

Administration's policies while allowing that the entire Vietnam situation was under consideration "from A to Z".<sup>48</sup> Senator Mansfield described the hearings as a stalemate, saying that "Dean Rusk handled himself magnificently, but of course no minds were changed."<sup>49</sup> The hearings did reveal, however, that serious misgivings about the war's direction and progress had spread from longstanding doves such as Fulbright, Mansfield, Aiken, Cooper, Wayne Morse and Frank Church to previously ardent hawks such as Republican Karl Mundt of South Dakota and Democrat Stuart Symington of Missouri. The misgivings about the conflict, so readily apparent in the SFRC, were spreading quickly throughout the entire Congress.<sup>50</sup>

Ironically, by the time of Rusk's appearance before the SFRC, President Johnson had decided to turn down the military's request for the massive troop increase but he had not revealed this information to the public. The month long debate within the Administration over U.S. policy in Vietnam had produced sobering and highly critical reports from Pentagon civilians recommending a shift in strategy from achieving a military victory to seeking a negotiated settlement. One report had warned that an increase in U.S troops could lead the government of South Vietnam and its military to willingly cede more and more control of the conflict to the United States, essentially forcing the U.S. military to assume the major burden of fighting the war.<sup>51</sup> Although the military vigorously opposed the Defense Department recommendations, Johnson decided to limit the troop increase while embarking on a strategy of bluntly telling South Vietnamese leaders that the U.S. was willing to send significant new supplies contingent on Saigon working to put its affairs in order while assuming a greater responsibility for fighting the war. Johnson also decided, by late March, to initiate a cutback in the bombing of North Vietnam as a prelude to new and serious peace negotiations. In order to push Johnson in this direction, Clark Clifford had recalled

---

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in "Foreign Policy: Growing Dissent", *Newsweek*, March 25, 1968, pp. 33-36.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>50</sup> *Newsweek's* Samuel Schaffer wrote that "the report that the President has been asked by our military commanders in Vietnam to increase our troop commitment by 200,000 men has brought Congress as close to mutiny as I have ever seen it. Hawks are being converted overnight to doves and House members in particular are falling over each other to get resolutions in the hopper, demanding that no more troops be sent." *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Herring, p. 196. One of the CIA assessments essentially painted a picture of an indeterminate stalemate in Vietnam. Even if the United States increased its troop level the North Vietnamese would simply match the increase, not allowing the U.S. to gain an appreciable advantage in force levels. *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Volume II* [The Senator Gravel Edition] (Boston, 1971), p. 552.

the Wise Men to Washington for a series of meetings in late March.<sup>52</sup> The senior advisory group had been consistently hawkish but on March 26 they presented the President with a recommendation that favoured immediate steps towards deescalating the conflict.<sup>53</sup> Clifford had learned beforehand that many of the men in the group had turned against the war since the Tet Offensive; he used the group to sway Johnson towards the Defense Secretary's own thinking. After the men had left Johnson commented, "somebody poisoned the well."<sup>54</sup>

Johnson's decision to emphasize attempts to gain a peaceful resolution to the conflict was accompanied by the President's momentous political decision to withdraw from the race for the Democratic nomination. The political pressure on the President had been steadily rising throughout March. The Tet Offensive, so largely damaging to the administration's policy in Vietnam, was also damaging to Johnson's reelection plans. Eugene McCarthy's previously moribund campaign gained in stature and momentum in the weeks leading up to the primary in New Hampshire. On March 12, McCarthy won 42.4% of the Democratic vote while Johnson garnered less than 49.5% in one of the most patriotic and warlike states in the Nation.<sup>55</sup> The vote reflected polls that revealed that 78% of Americans believed that the United States was not making any progress in Vietnam, although 45% of the public still supported the war. Approval for Johnson's handling of the conflict, however, had descended to its lowest point, a mere 26%.<sup>56</sup> McCarthy's performance in New Hampshire had also convinced Robert Kennedy to declare his candidacy for the Presidency.

In January Kennedy had decided to stay out of the race for the Presidency but the Tet Offensive had changed political circumstances to such an extent that the New York Senator began to reconsider his decision. Two days after the New Hampshire primary Kennedy met with Clark Clifford to discuss the idea

---

<sup>52</sup> The group consisted of Dean Acheson, Arthur Goldberg, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Henry Cabot Lodge, Abe Fortas, Douglas Dillon, John J. McCloy, Robert Murphy, Maxwell Taylor, Omar Bradley, Matthew Ridgway, Walt Rostow, Dean Rusk, Clark Clifford and Earle Wheeler.

<sup>53</sup> Gravel ed., p. 592. The group's findings were summarized as follows in the *Pentagon Papers*: "Continued escalation of the war – intensified bombings of North Vietnam and increased American troops in the South – would do no good. Forget about seeking a battlefield solution to the problem and instead intensify efforts to seek a political solution at the negotiating table."

<sup>54</sup> Karnow, p. 562.

<sup>55</sup> White, p. 89. After combining Democratic and Republican votes the final tally was even closer. McCarthy won 28,791 votes, a scant 230 less than Johnson's total of 29,021. Further examination of the vote revealed that McCarthy's voters were as likely to be hawks dissatisfied with Johnson's handling of the war, as they were to be doves. The initial analysis, however, emphasized that the vote reflected a burgeoning discontent with the progress of the war and the desire for a peaceful settlement.

<sup>56</sup> Herring, pp. 202-203.

of appointing a national commission to review United States policy in Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> Although Clifford showed interest, Johnson had no choice but to turn down the offer. It seemed like a political deal of the highest order: if Johnson agreed he would be abdicating presidential power in foreign policy to a commission controlled by his chief political adversary in the Democratic Party. Kennedy used the rejection of the commission as the final impetus and justification for announcing his candidacy. On March 16, Kennedy formally declared his intention to seek the Democratic nomination for President.

George Aiken had been one of the people Kennedy had proposed for membership on the commission in his discussion with Clifford.<sup>58</sup> Aiken soon after gave his wholehearted support to the commission idea, declaring that it had the potential to end the war. Aiken said that although Kennedy had not spoken to him before offering his name to the President he believed it would "have brought the war to an honourable conclusion."<sup>59</sup> Aiken also knew that the commission idea was a non-starter for political reasons, commenting that although he considered it very helpful, he could have told Kennedy that Johnson wouldn't have accepted it, something that Aiken suspected Kennedy knew as well. As far as Kennedy's candidacy was concerned, Aiken made it clear that although the New York Senator had angered a great many people in Washington by entering the race, he was not among them. He said that "Kennedy is getting a lot of abuse and a lot of people are talking about him in terms that can't be printed in a newspaper but he must have known it was coming. I think he felt it was now or never for him."<sup>60</sup> Aiken also described Eugene McCarthy as a man of courage, character and ability but he expected the Minnesota Democrat's forces to be overrun by Kennedy in the battle to confront Johnson for the nomination. Aiken was clearly unwilling to offer a criticism of either candidate because he was hopeful that one of them

---

<sup>57</sup> According to Arthur Schlesinger and Jules Witcover, Kennedy had all but decided to announce his candidacy before the New Hampshire primary. Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago had proposed the commission idea to him and Kennedy seized upon it as a last resort of avoiding the race. As one of his advisers said, "Bob wanted to stop the war but he also wanted to preserve his long-term political future. If he could have achieved both by staying out, he would not have run." Quoted in Witcover, p. 80.

<sup>58</sup> The people that Kennedy proposed for inclusion on the commission were Senators Aiken, Mansfield, Cooper as well as himself, and Roswell Gilpatrick, Carl Kaysen, Edwin Reischauer, Generals Lauris Norstad and Kingman Brewster. With the exception of Norstad and Brewster, all of the men had publicly spoken out against further escalation of the war. This was another reason that Johnson had no choice but to reject the idea, the commission's conclusions were apparent in advance. Schlesinger, p. 915.

<sup>59</sup> *The Burlington Free Press* (March 19, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 7, Folder 24.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

would succeed in defeating Johnson, thereby offering a Democratic peace candidate in the general election, perhaps forcing the GOP nominee to be less hawkish.<sup>61</sup>

On March 31, in a nationally televised speech, Lyndon Johnson, after detailing new peace initiatives for Vietnam, announced that he would not seek the Democratic nomination for President in 1968. The bombshell announcement came as a great surprise to reporters, politicians and the general public. Privately Johnson had for some time considered not running for another term but had steadfastly maintained a public demeanor that suggested he would attempt to continue in office. He had come to realize that he had spent all of his political capital and another term would be consumed by conflict and empty of any significant accomplishment.<sup>62</sup> Johnson hoped that by removing himself from the political arena he could convince the North Vietnamese government of the seriousness of his aim to achieve peace in Vietnam.<sup>63</sup> To that end Johnson announced that American bombing raids would be limited to the area just north of the demilitarized zone, pledging that if Hanoi displayed similar restraint the United States would cease bombing entirely. He also said that veteran diplomat Averell Harriman would be available to begin peace negotiations with Hanoi at any time and any place.<sup>64</sup> Johnson's conciliatory tone and the olive branch he extended to North Vietnam were not, however, accompanied by a significant change of strategy. The United States continued to cling to the goal of achieving an independent, non-communist South Vietnam. As a result, negotiations, begun in Paris in May, quickly reached an impasse as both sides clung to their bargaining positions. The United States continued to insist that North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam be withdrawn while North Vietnam insisted that the Vietcong be allowed to join the South Vietnamese government.<sup>65</sup> The talks would continue for another five long years.

George Aiken was as surprised by Johnson's decision as most of the people around the country. He reacted to the speech by saying, "the prospects for peace are definitely improved by the President's decision. I expect that Bobby's announcement may have brought on the decision but this is a desperate,

---

<sup>61</sup> Aiken continued to offer dire warnings of the Johnson Administration's intentions regarding a buildup in Vietnam. He remained convinced that the President was intent on stepping up American troop strength. In mid March he said, "I think he'll send 25,000 soon, then another 25,000 later and perhaps more. Westmoreland has been told that he'll have to get along with this many until after the election." *The Burlington Free Press* (March 13, 1968). Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 8, Folder 1. Aiken's comments reveal the level of distrust he felt towards the Johnson Administration.

<sup>62</sup> Herring, p. 207.

<sup>63</sup> Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (London, 1971), p. 436.

<sup>64</sup> *The New York Times* (April 1, 1968), sect. 1, p. 26, cols. 1-6.

<sup>65</sup> Karnow, p. 566.

sacrificial step. The President has sacrificed his ambition and he also bills himself a creditable space in history. History will record it so and the President should be given full credit for it. I have always claimed that the President wanted peace badly. Both he and Ho Chi Minh want peace badly. Now he's taking steps towards de-escalation that will make it possible to let the war fade out."<sup>66</sup> Aiken's relief that Johnson had put aside politics in what the Vermont Senator believed was a sincere attempt to achieve peace, is readily apparent. Ultimately, Johnson's policies would disappoint the Vermont Senator once again, but Aiken felt that the President's decision had given real impetus to potential peace negotiations. Aiken also believed that Robert Kennedy now had a legitimate chance at garnering his party's presidential nomination, a prospect that pleased him. On the Republican side, however, the chances of a peace candidate emerging remained slim at best.

Aiken had continued to encourage Nelson Rockefeller to announce his candidacy for the Republican nomination throughout the month of April. Aiken believed that Rockefeller could defeat any candidate nominated by the Democratic Party. Nixon, however, would, in Aiken's view, go down to defeat at the hands of any Democrat with the possible exception of Robert Kennedy. Aiken also recognized that the New York Governor would have a difficult time wresting the nomination away from Nixon at this late juncture but he believed that Rockefeller would arouse considerable Republican support if he made the race. Like Rockefeller, Aiken based this belief on the New Yorker's strength at the polls: a strength that he believed would appeal to a broad spectrum of Republicans. Aiken said, "there is a greater desire to win in the Republican Party than ever before."<sup>67</sup> Aiken remained disturbed by the possibility of Richard Nixon becoming the GOP standard bearer, declaring that he would "go fishing" if the former Vice President won the nomination of his Party without changing his views on Vietnam.<sup>68</sup>

Under enormous pressure from liberal Republicans such as Aiken, Rockefeller finally announced that he was an active candidate for the Republican nomination for President on April 30, 1968. Although the beginning of the campaign garnered considerable press attention and apparent public support, Rockefeller had indeed waited too long. While Rockefeller had dithered on the sidelines, Nixon had encountered little

<sup>66</sup> *The Burlington Free Press* (April 1, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 8, Folder 1.

<sup>67</sup> *The Brattleboro Daily Reformer* (April 22, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 8, Folder 1.

<sup>68</sup> *The New York Times* (August 10, 1968), sect. 1, p. 12, col. 6.



opposition in the Republican primaries, winning handily and displaying his own electoral strength in a tangible manner. By some accounts Nixon had already amassed a majority of the delegates in the week following Rockefeller's announcement.<sup>69</sup> Nixon had also shrewdly incorporated some of Barry Goldwater's tactics from 1964 by dominating the delegate nominating conventions in those states that did not hold electoral primaries. Although Rockefeller toured the country relentlessly in the months leading up to the convention he was unable to shake the support of enough committed Nixon delegates to significantly erode Nixon's support.

Rockefeller's strategy rested on denying Nixon a first ballot victory at the Miami GOP convention. In order to accomplish this, Rockefeller had to hope that he and Governor Ronald Reagan could garner enough support between the two of them to deadlock the convention. Rockefeller then hoped that delegates would recognize that he had the nationwide appeal that would guarantee a Republican victory in November. On the eve of the convention, however, Nixon aides gleefully revealed to the delegates the latest Gallup poll that had Nixon ahead of Rockefeller in a contest against either of the Democratic challengers.<sup>70</sup> The essential element of Rockefeller's appeal had been shattered, and Nixon gained the nomination on the first ballot.

While Rockefeller was unable to prevent Nixon from winning the nomination, he was successful in insuring that the party platform contained conciliatory language on Vietnam. The New York Governor threatened to campaign directly against the Party standard bearer if an appeal for peace was not included in the platform. Nixon, to the surprise of some of his aides, readily agreed to the inclusion of a Vietnam plank that positioned the Party on the path to negotiation over escalation.<sup>71</sup> Nixon's reasons were simple, he knew that he had to leave the convention with his Party united if he stood any chance of being successful in November. In order to accomplish this, Nixon allowed the party plank to include language that although ambiguous, proposed de-Americanizing the war. The plank pledged "a program for peace in Vietnam – neither peace at any price nor a camouflaged surrender of legitimate United States or allied

---

<sup>69</sup> According to a *New York Times* survey, 725 of the 1,333 Republican delegates were committed or leaning to Nixon, with 402 for Rockefeller and 206 for Ronald Reagan. *The New York Times* (May 5, 1968), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>70</sup> White, p. 238.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon – Volume Two: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York, 1989), pp. 166-169.

interests – but a positive program that will offer a fair and equitable settlement to all, based on the principle of self-determination, our national interests and the cause of long-range world peace.”<sup>72</sup> The Vietnam plank in the Party platform proved a deft document, used to unite the liberal and conservative wings of the GOP in an attempt to quell dissent within the Party, thereby allowing Nixon the opportunity to broaden the Republican base in order to win the White House. In this pursuit, the platform succeeded.

Aiken recognized that the party platform on Vietnam was driven by political concerns. He described it by saying “in foreign relations, they have something for everybody. Those who want to bomb the hell out of Vietnam will find it there. Those who want to pull out, there’s something for them, too.”<sup>73</sup> Aiken was relieved, however, that Nixon had not insisted on an aggressive Vietnam plank in the platform and was pleased to note that the GOP nominee had tempered his strident views on Southeast Asia. For this reason, Aiken began to praise his party’s standard bearer for the Presidency. According to Aiken, Nixon’s greatest liability rested on the fact that “he suffers from the ardor of his far-out supporters” but the Vermont Republican believed that Nixon would resist their influence.<sup>74</sup> He said that “the war has changed and Mr. Nixon has toned down a lot. I think he realizes we can’t take on the entire world.”<sup>75</sup> Aiken said further “I think we’ll find that he will move away from his far-out supporters. The American people don’t want this war and he knows that. The people of the country think like Gene (McCarthy) does about it.”<sup>76</sup> Aiken, although not fully enthusiastic about his party’s ticket, also pledged to work to achieve Nixon’s election, predicting that if the Democrats did not nominate Eugene McCarthy, the Republicans would gain the White House in November.”

Aiken knew that the Democrats would almost certainly nominate Hubert Humphrey for the Presidency. Robert Kennedy had done well in the Democratic primaries that he entered, winning all save for that contested in Oregon. The battle between Kennedy and McCarthy had, however, splintered the peace wing

---

<sup>72</sup> *The New York Times* (August 11, 1968), sect. 4, p. 1, col. 7.

<sup>73</sup> *The Boston Sunday Globe* (August 11, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 21. Aiken did not attend the convention in Miami. In all of his time as a Senator Aiken had only been to two conventions. As he said, he would have been content to make the 1940 convention his first and last but he had gone to San Francisco in 1964 to place Margaret Chase Smith’s name in nomination for the presidency. Aiken and Mansfield had in fact worked on a constitutional amendment that would have eliminated conventions, replacing them with a national primary to decide presidential and vice presidential candidates.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *The New York Times* (August 10, 1968), sect. 1, p. 12, col. 6.

<sup>76</sup> *The Boston Sunday Globe* (August 11, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 21.

<sup>77</sup> Aiken did allow that he had watched some of the convention on television but he said, “when they start talking, you know, those fellas, sometimes they tend to put me to sleep.” *Ibid.*

of the Party. While the two Senators had been busy fighting each other for primary votes, Vice President Hubert Humphrey announced his intention to seek the nomination of his party and he had traveled the country assiduously courting the votes of Democratic delegates. Lyndon Johnson threw his considerable support behind Humphrey's bid, enabling the Minnesota Democrat to amass a significant number of delegates without having to enter any of the primaries. Kennedy had hoped to demonstrate his ability to garner votes by decisively sweeping all of the primaries he entered thereby proving to the delegates that he constituted the best chance for the Democrats to retain the White House. At the same time he hoped to pick up McCarthy's supporters after driving the Minnesota Senator from the race. In the end, Kennedy's strategy was similar to Nelson Rockefeller's, deny Humphrey the nomination on the first ballot and hope that a Kennedy sweep would overtake the convention on the second ballot. After winning the South Dakota and California primaries on June 4, Kennedy seemed to have regained the momentum he had lost the previous week in Oregon. He would never have the chance to test his strength at the Chicago convention, however; he was assassinated shortly after his California victory speech.<sup>78</sup>

Following their leader's death, the Kennedy forces would never regain their focus; the split in the peace forces would remain too great to bridge. The enmity that developed between the McCarthy and Kennedy factions during the primaries proved too much to overcome. A drive by Senator George McGovern in the weeks leading up to the convention to solidify the Kennedy delegates in an attempt to emerge as the compromise candidate at the convention proved to be too little, too late. Humphrey's delegate strength proved to be even more formidable than Richard Nixon's and he was nominated to be his party standard bearer in decisive fashion on the first ballot.<sup>79</sup> Unlike Nixon, however, Humphrey was unable to unite his party following the convention.

---

<sup>78</sup> Kennedy's death was a blow to Aiken on a personal and professional basis. The two men had worked together in the Senate regularly and Aiken also recognized that Kennedy's death represented a critical blow to the peace forces in the Democratic Party. After he retired from the Senate Aiken described Kennedy this way: "Bobby was a worker and I was very sorry when he came to grief. He was cooperative. We folks in New England would usually stick together." Morrissey and Sanford, p. 171. At the time of Kennedy's death, Aiken offered a tribute to him in the Senate. He said, "Mr. President, at a time like this I am at a loss for words. I have known Bobby Kennedy a long time. It was my privilege to work with him when he was a Senate employee, when he served as Attorney General, and when he became a U.S. Senator from New York. Robert Kennedy was a powerful influence in the field of National government. Whether one agreed with him or not on the issues of the day, all persons agreed that he kept both the Congress and the executive branch of government on their toes and a bit more anxious to meet the public needs. As for his wife, Ethel, and his children, we do not have to say that they have our full sympathy. They can and will be eternally proud of their husband and father. The legacy he leaves them will always be a source of pride and honour. If there were words adequate to express our sorrow, I would hunt for them, but I realize now that such a search would indeed be futile. Congressional Record - Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p. 16163.

<sup>79</sup> White, p. 303.

Lyndon Johnson had insisted that support for the administration's policies in Vietnam be made unequivocal in the party platform. In a bitter platform floor fight, the Humphrey forces won the right to include tough language on Vietnam. The final plank read, in part, "We reject as unacceptable a unilateral withdrawal. We strongly support the Paris talks and applaud the initiative of President Johnson which brought North Vietnam to the peace table. Stop all bombing of North Vietnam but only when the action would not endanger the lives of our troops; this action should take into account the response from Hanoi."<sup>80</sup> The floor fight over the platform was extremely bitter and contentious; leaving the party irreparably divided over Vietnam. Humphrey was left damaged by the fight as well as by the rioting and pitched battles that occurred between Chicago police forces and peace demonstrators gathered in the city. The Democratic nominee staggered out of Chicago as the leader of a dispirited and fractured party.

On a personal basis George Aiken was very much an admirer of Hubert Humphrey. Aiken described the Minnesota Democrat as a versatile man without "an enemy in the world, you can't hate him."<sup>81</sup> As a presidential candidate and a man capable of achieving peace in Vietnam, however, Aiken doubted Humphrey could be effective in either role. Aiken lamented the fact that Humphrey had become a solid proponent of an aggressive policy in Vietnam. Reflecting on the change that Humphrey had undergone from his time in the Senate to his role as Vice President, Aiken said 'Hubert was the prince of the peace bloc before he was Vice President. Some think he died after.'<sup>82</sup> Aiken did not believe that Humphrey had the capacity to say no to people, an element he felt was essential in achieving an effective presidency.<sup>83</sup> Aiken had hoped for a choice between two effective agents of peace in the presidential election and he had not spared Richard Nixon criticism in the time leading up to his selection as the GOP nominee. In a choice between Nixon and Humphrey, however, Aiken leaned towards the choice of his Party. If the election had been between Nixon and McCarthy Aiken might have refrained from speaking on behalf of

---

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in White, p. 276.

<sup>81</sup> *Brattleboro Daily Reformer* (April 22, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 8, Folder 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Boston Sunday Globe* (August 11, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 34, Box 2, Folder 21.

<sup>83</sup> In the oral history compiled at the University of Vermont, Aiken was asked if Humphrey would have made a good president. He responded: "I never thought so. I think he's made a better senator and done the country more good as senator than he would have done as president because it was so hard for him to turn anyone down. He was no Sherm Adams. Sherm could say no right off the bat when he was with Ike and that's what got him into trouble of course. Said no two or three times when his friends expected him to say yes. But Hubert had great difficulty in saying no. And he wrote me a letter once. He asked why I didn't like him, what was wrong with him. I wrote back, took pains to tell him, what he was doing was speaking on every subject that came up in the Senate, whether he knew anything about it or not [chuckles]. He had to speak on it. And I said, 'If I didn't like you I wouldn't be writing you this letter'." Morrissey and Sanford, p. 169.

Nixon. As it was, Aiken believed that he could more easily influence Nixon as President than he could Humphrey.

Aiken remained popular in his home state and it seemed that he would face little or no opposition in his bid to retain his seat. He was the target of attacks by ultra conservative members of the Vermont Republican Party at the beginning of 1968 and in the fall he was challenged by William K. Tufts in the GOP Senate primary. Aiken easily defeated Tufts in the primary and after the Democrats put up no opposition in the general election, Aiken was reelected with over 99% of the vote.<sup>84</sup>

Aiken's easy reelection campaign stood in contrast to some of those waged by his Senate colleagues with similar views on Vietnam. On the Democratic side, Ernest Gruening, William Fulbright, Frank Church, Wayne Morse, Joseph Clark, George McGovern and Gaylord Nelson were all doves seeking reelection. Among Republicans opposed to the war, only Aiken and Jacob Javits were seeking to return to Washington. Thurston Morton of Kentucky, another of the Republican Senate doves, had decided to retire from politics and was not running for reelection. Javits was actually helped by the fact that his Democratic challenger in New York, Paul O'Dwyer, was considered an extreme peace candidate. Although James L. Buckley ran under the Conservative Party banner and garnered a little more than a million votes, Javits was able to hold onto a large portion of his Republican base and easily defeated O'Dwyer in what was considered a very progressive state at the time.<sup>85</sup>

Among Democrats, however, the Senate doves did not fare as well in some races. Ernest Gruening was challenged in the Democratic primary and lost to his more hawkish rival, Mike Gravel. Gravel went on to win election to the Senate in November. In the other Senate races the issue of the war played differently depending on the State. In Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Oregon there was strong sentiment for trying to achieve a peaceful settlement to the war. In Arkansas and Idaho, meanwhile, large numbers of the population favoured more aggressive military action, aimed at achieving victory on the battlefield.<sup>86</sup> Opposition to the Administration's policies did not, however, translate into victory for Clark

---

<sup>84</sup> "Doves Gain: War Uncertainties Shift Outlook on Senate Races". *The Christian Science Monitor* (February 14, 1968). Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 7, Folder 24.

<sup>85</sup> *The New York Times* (November 8, 1968), sect. 1, p. 26, cols. 1-3.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* (September 29, 1968), sect. 4, p. 2, col. 8.

of Pennsylvania and Morse of Oregon. Clark, in an attempt to repair damage to the unity of the Pennsylvania Democratic Party, insisted that it was imperative to vote the straight party line, thereby linking himself with an administration that he had criticized vigorously on Vietnam. Although there were many issues in the Pennsylvania race, Vietnam seemed to be an albatross for Clark and Richard Schweiker defeated him.<sup>87</sup> In Oregon, Morse was badly damaged by a bruising primary campaign against Robert Duncan. Morse's Republican opponent in the general election also ran a highly effective and mistake free campaign while the Oregon Democratic Party struggled with internal dissent. Morse's chief difficulty was traceable to his often contentious opposition to the Vietnam War, a view that left some members of his own party unhappy with his performance. Robert Packwood defeated Morse by a mere 3,445 votes, less than one percent of the more than 814,000 cast.<sup>88</sup>

The remaining Democrats seeking reelection to the Senate were successful in their bids. In Arkansas, Fulbright's opposition may have actually helped him win the votes of some conservatives. Many Arkansans disapproved of Fulbright's outspoken criticism of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia but they admired the fact that he had stood up to President Johnson on this issue. Many conservatives in Arkansas believed that Johnson had mired the country in a war he was unwilling to commit to winning.<sup>89</sup> Fulbright also appealed to a substantial number of conservatives because of consistent opposition to civil rights initiatives, a fact that aided him in his efforts to garner votes in many parts of Arkansas. Fulbright easily won reelection in the fall, defeating his Republican opponent, Charles Bernard and winning 64 percent of the vote. In Idaho, Frank Church also tried to use the fact that he opposed the Johnson administration on Vietnam to his advantage. Church stressed that he was merely asserting his independence and standing up for the rights of the Western states. He emphasized local issues such as his opposition to gun control laws while stressing his support for America's fighting men in the field. Church defeated his opponent, Congressman George Hansen, a self styled superhawk, decisively on Election Day, winning 61 percent of

---

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* (November 6, 1968), sect. 1, p. 20, cols. 4-8.

<sup>88</sup> Mason Drukman, *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography* (Portland, Oregon, 1997), p. 454. Morse demanded a recount in several state precincts. Roughly 60,000 votes were reexamined, changing the margin of defeat by only 200 votes. Morse finally conceded in December, ending his twenty-four year Senate career.

<sup>89</sup> Woods, p. 496.

the vote.<sup>90</sup> In South Dakota, George McGovern, initially buoyed by polls showing him winning 70 percent of the vote, struggled to defeat his Republican rival, former Governor Archie M. Gubbard. McGovern's stance on the war did not hurt him very much because the majority of South Dakotans had come to agree with his position on the conflict.<sup>91</sup> After the Chicago convention, however, Hubert Humphrey's popularity in the state plummeted. McGovern had to work hard to overcome the unpopularity of the national Democratic ticket, finally gaining reelection, winning 57 percent of the vote. In Wisconsin, Gaylord Nelson, after facing a strong early challenge from Jerris Leonard, easily defeated his young rival, garnering over 60 percent of the vote in a state that gave its electoral votes to Humphrey in the presidential election.<sup>92</sup>

Those dove Senators that were successful in their reelection campaigns were able to localize, to a large extent, the issues dominating the political discourse in their respective states. Men such as Fulbright and Church, representatives of largely conservative states, emphasized their stands on issues that would appeal to conservatives. Others, such as McGovern and Javits, had worked to convince voters in their states that their stance on the Vietnam War was right but they were known for more than just their opposition to the war. Gruening and Morse had become synonymous with dissent on Vietnam and their campaigns were consumed to a great degree by their controversial public posturing on the war. Aiken's standing with Vermont voters was such that he was able to appeal to thousands of people who disagreed with his position on Vietnam. During his brief primary fight, Aiken had continued to insist that U.S. policy in Vietnam was a mistake. His overwhelming victory in the primary demonstrated that although some members of his party took issue with his stand on Vietnam, the vast majority of Vermont Republicans continued to support their senior Senator.

Nationally, Richard Nixon enjoyed a substantial lead in the polls throughout most of the fall. The fallout from the Democratic convention had tremendously hurt Humphrey and he struggled to make up

---

<sup>90</sup> Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting The Odds: The Life of Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), pp. 261-283. Church also helped himself tremendously by staying away from the Democratic convention in Chicago thereby avoiding being tarred by the rioting and general disorder seen on the convention floor and in the streets.

<sup>91</sup> *The New York Times* (September 29, 1968), sect. 4, p. 2, cols. 6-7. Robert Kennedy had won the most decisive victory of his primary campaign, getting over 50 percent of the vote. Combined with Eugene McCarthy's 20 percent, an overwhelming 70 percent of Democrats participating in the primary had given their votes to peace candidates, revealing the widespread dissatisfaction with Vietnam policy in the state. George McGovern, *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern* (New York, 1977), p. 116.

<sup>92</sup> *The New York Times* (September 29, 1968), sect. 4, p. 2, col. 8 and *The New York Times* (November 8, 1968), sect. 1, p. 26, cols. 1-2.

ground on his opponent. Humphrey was also shackled by the perception that he represented the views of Lyndon Johnson on Vietnam. In an attempt to separate him from the administration's Vietnam policies, Humphrey gave a speech, televised nationally, in Salt Lake City on September 30. Humphrey pledged that as President he would halt the bombing of North Vietnam, declare a cease-fire and work towards de-Americanizing the war while striving to achieve a withdrawal of all foreign forces from South Vietnam. The speech represented a turning point in the Humphrey campaign, and the Vice President began to close ground on Nixon in the national polls.<sup>93</sup> Helping Humphrey further, President Johnson, towards the end of the campaign, announced that the United States would cease the bombing of North Vietnam, telling the nation, "I have reached this decision on the basis of the developments of the Paris talks and I have reached it in the belief that this action can lead to progress towards a peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese war. What we can now expect – what we have a right to expect, are prompt, productive, serious and intensive negotiations in an atmosphere that is conducive to progress."<sup>94</sup>

Aiken reacted quite positively to the news of the bombing halt. In a burst of misguided optimism Aiken said that he thought "something definite should come out of the peace talks within three months or sooner."<sup>95</sup> In the end, the proposal was the last serious effort by Lyndon Johnson to end the war, and it proved to be an utter failure. Nor was the initiative enough to save the campaign of Hubert Humphrey. Nixon was elected President of the United States on November 5, 1968. Eight years of Democratic control of the White House had ended. Vietnam had now become the primary responsibility of the new Republican President, Richard Nixon.

---

<sup>93</sup> White, p. 354-58.

<sup>94</sup> *The New York Times* (November 1, 1968), sect. 1, p. 1, col. 8.

<sup>95</sup> *St. Albans Messenger* (November 1, 1968), Aiken Papers, Crate 39, Box 8, Folder 1.



## CONCLUSION

Although George Aiken had consistently opposed the escalation of the war in Vietnam, he nonetheless recognized the responsibility of the United States to protect the citizens of South Vietnam. Aiken believed that North Vietnam would wreak havoc upon the people of South Vietnam if given the chance. As a result, the Vermont Senator maintained that the United States would have to continue to station troops in South Vietnam for years to come. Even in his famous speech of October, 1966, one that included Aiken's proposal that the U.S. declare victory in Vietnam, the Republican stressed that an American presence in the area could not simply cease overnight. Aiken believed that American troops would remain stationed in South Vietnam for a minimum of fifteen years. Aiken's criticism of the Johnson administration, therefore, did not center on the inability of the U.S. to simply withdraw from South Vietnam, but rather on the fact that the White House continued to escalate the conflict further and further by constantly increasing the number of American troops involved in the war. Aiken also did not believe that Vietnam constituted a vital area of concern for the United States. The Vermonter did not believe in the so-called domino theory nor did he subscribe to the idea that North Vietnam represented an integral part of a monolithic communist enemy, one that had to be met on the battlefields of Southeast Asia. Aiken stressed that Vietnam had been a traditional enemy of China and that Hanoi had only looked to Peking for support in order to drive the United States from South Vietnam. He believed that the United States was interfering in a civil war, one fueled more by nationalism than by communism.

The issue of executive preeminence in foreign affairs also preoccupied the Senate during the Vietnam War. The two issues intertwined as members of the Senate struggled to limit American involvement in Vietnam. Many Senators believed that an imperial presidency had been created in the highly charged Cold War years following the Second World War, one vested with powers not prescribed by the Constitution. Although Aiken shared this concern, he did not believe that Congress should direct the day to day handling of American foreign policy. He believed that the rightful role of Congress involved debating the relative merits of foreign policy objectives while appropriating funds and advising the executive branch. In Aiken's view, President Dwight Eisenhower had consulted Congress suitably during his time in office. During the

Kennedy and Johnson administrations, however, Aiken came to believe that the executive branch had begun to act in an increasingly unilateral manner in foreign affairs. Aiken was disturbed by the increasing propensity of the Johnson White House to operate the foreign policy of the United States with impunity, rarely seeking the advice of members of Congress.<sup>1</sup> Again, Aiken deviated somewhat from his dove colleagues, taking more of a middle ground on the issue of executive power. Senators such as William Fulbright and Wayne Morse were much more aggressive in denouncing the Johnson White House's tendency to act unilaterally in Vietnam. Aiken considered the meetings held between Johnson and members of Congress as little more than briefing sessions. The White House, according to Aiken, was not interested in engaging the legislative branch of government in true consultative encounters. The Vermont Senator regarded the administration's handling of the war in Vietnam as a serious usurpation of power by the executive branch. It seems, however, that Aiken was more disturbed by the fact that the Johnson White House ignored his suggestions than by its attempt to grab more power.

Evidence of Aiken's displeasure exists in the fact that he supported Richard Nixon's handling of the war in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> Although Aiken had clashed with Nixon over Vietnam policy while the latter was a private citizen during the Johnson administration, the Vermont Senator changed his tack when Nixon became President. The apparent inconsistency of this switch can be explained very simply: Nixon initiated a policy with which Aiken was largely in agreement. Nixon's Vietnamization strategy was in accordance with Aiken's desire to disengage the United States from the war. Aiken seemingly dismissed his concerns over the increasing supremacy of executive power in foreign affairs as it related to Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, two men who attempted to center foreign policy in the White House in an unprecedented manner. The gradual nature of Nixon's planned withdrawal, however, met with Aiken's approval as he had warned repeatedly that taking U.S. forces out of Southeast Asia in haste would have disastrous consequences in the region. In fact, Nixon's plans, in Aiken's view, corresponded to ideas he had enunciated in his October 1966 Senate speech. The U.S. could declare that it had achieved its

---

<sup>1</sup> Johnson Library, George Aiken interview, October 10, 1968, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Aiken objected to certain Vietnam related policies such as the 1972 Christmas bombing of North Vietnam, referring to the period as "a week of shock, dismay, and disbelief." For the most part, however, he supported Nixon's foreign policy direction. Quoted in George D. Aiken, *Aiken: Senate Diary, January 1972 - January 1975* (Brattleboro, Vermont, 1976), p. 134.

objectives in South Vietnam and the war would slowly fade away as the U.S. bolstered the Saigon regime, enabling it to survive on its own. It has been argued that the 1973 Paris Peace Accords were an acceptance of some form of the blueprint Aiken enunciated in 1966; the United States withdrew its forces while everyone simultaneously declared some form of victory.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the fall of Saigon a scant two years later illustrated that Aiken had been correct in declaring that the United States would have to maintain a military presence in South Vietnam for at least fifteen years.

During the years of the Johnson administration, Aiken's inability to alter the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam echoed the inability of the Senate as a whole to exert significant control of American foreign policy. Lyndon Johnson was unwilling to listen to the advice of any member of Congress and he essentially dared the legislative branch to overturn the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, knowing full well that it would be political suicide for most Senators and Congressman to vote against American troops in the field. The Congress continued to vote for funds for American troops without substantial dissension throughout the Johnson years. In this sense, all of the criticism offered by Aiken and some of his Senate colleagues did nothing to alter the continuing escalation of the war in Vietnam. Ultimately, Aiken's dissent, much like that of Fulbright, Mansfield, Morse and Church, did little to reverse the direction of American policy during the time Lyndon Johnson occupied the White House. With the exception of Morse, the Senate dissenters continued to hew to the Senate's tradition and decorum.<sup>4</sup> Aiken was also careful to preserve his standing in the Senate. The Senate dissenters believed that they could only influence the direction of U.S. policy if they were to remain a legitimate part of the system in Washington. For this reason, they continued to support the administration's appropriation demands, unwilling to risk being marginalized. Aiken's words, as well as those of others, fell largely on deaf ears at the White House. Johnson continued to escalate the war well into

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Sherman ed., *The Political Legacy of George David Aiken: Wise Old Owl of The U.S. Senate* (Woodstock, Vermont, 1995), p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> In the summer of 1965 Frank Church told a member of his staff, "I may wash my hands of the whole affair, as Wayne Morse has done and enter the Never-Never-Land of radically ineffectual dissent." In the end however, as outlined in the Ashby and Gramer biography, Church continued to work within the system in an attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to moderate the Johnson Administration's policies. Quoted in Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting The Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), p. 213.

1968. Only the Tet offensive and Eugene McCarthy's surprise showing in the New Hampshire primary gave the President reason to pause that year.<sup>5</sup>

Aiken was more successful in preventing the Republican Party from being entirely overrun by hawkish elements during the 1960s. His influence within the party, although he was not a source of leadership power, was quite strong. His integrity and extensive experience allowed him to quietly influence his colleagues and he helped to influence the views of a number of Senators that developed misgivings about the conflict. His position as a Republican gave the movement more of a bipartisan appeal. Aiken attempted to slow the tendency of Republicans to call for more aggressive tactics in Vietnam. Although Aiken was at times unsuccessful in this endeavor, his continued calls for scaling back American involvement in Vietnam produced another lasting consequence during the Johnson years. His position as a respected senior member of the Republican Party, and his reputation for integrity and honesty, allowed other GOP Senators such as Charles Percy, Mark Hatfield, Jacob Javits and Thurston Morton to join him in calling for a more peaceful direction for American policy in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Aiken's reputation and standing in the Senate provided political cover as these Senators joined the growing number of colleagues that were questioning the Johnson administration's policies in Vietnam. Members of the Republican Party had to tread very carefully in offering dissent on Vietnam lest they be cast as pure partisans. Aiken's adroit offering of criticism exemplified Republican dissent. Republican Senators were universally more moderate in their criticism than many of their Democratic colleagues. Their dissent never reached the level of stridency apparent in the critiques offered by Fulbright, Morse, Gruening, Robert Kennedy and other Democrats. While the Senate was unable to directly influence Lyndon Johnson, the bipartisan dissent on Vietnam that Aiken was instrumental in helping to achieve during the Texan's time in the White House took on added importance during the divisive and contentious debates held in the Senate during Richard Nixon's tenure in power. Ultimately, the successful passage of a Congressional amendment to end military operations in Indochina as well as the War Powers Act in 1973 can be traced in part to Aiken's efforts to make Vietnam dissent a position held by members of both political parties.

---

<sup>5</sup> Although Johnson announced a bombing halt as well as a renewed willingness to negotiate during his March 31, 1968, television speech announcing his withdrawal from that year's Presidential race, the Administration continued to pursue an aggressive military policy in Vietnam throughout the remainder of 1968. Johnson instructed his peace negotiators to stand firm on any concessions, this intransigence doomed the peace talks to failure. <sup>6</sup> George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1986), pp 208-209.

In the end, the Senate proved to be ineffective as an institution in offering a vigorous and coherent alternative to U.S. policy in Vietnam. The Senate's position as a slow moving and deliberate arena for change prevented its members from challenging the supremacy of the executive branch during the Johnson years. Aiken, like many of his colleagues, protected his position within the Senate with a considerable amount of zeal. Directly challenging the Johnson administration through legislative means would have been looked upon by many Senators with suspicion and dismay, as they worried how such an act would effect their individuals positions. Moreover, in a body with one hundred members, achieving consensus on how to act proved to be impossible. Even within the more narrow confines of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, consensus proved illusory among the committee as a whole as well as among the dovish members. Aiken also failed to offer, as did many of the other leading Senate doves, concrete leadership to his like-minded colleagues. Men such as William Fulbright, Mike Mansfield and Robert Kennedy, although powerful members of the Senate, did not, for various reasons, come forward to lead the anti-war faction in Congress.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the anti-war Senators were often at odds with each other and were not able to offer a single alternative to U.S. policy. Aiken's criticisms, therefore, while increasingly forceful and direct, were often given in isolation, blunting their impact. The inability of the Senate's leading doves to offer a united alternative to U.S. policy in Vietnam diluted their message and made it easier for the Johnson administration to ignore their pleas to de-escalate the war, a failing that Aiken shared in.

The importance of Senate dissent lay in the legitimacy it offered the anti-war movement. Many Americans resented the activities of anti-war protesters, especially the more radical 'hippie' members of the movement. Opinion polls conducted during Johnson's time in the White House revealed that a majority of Americans found the anti-war movement even more distasteful than the war itself; ironically, such attitudes may have strengthened support for the conflict.<sup>7</sup> The 1966 SFRC hearings, however, revealed to millions of Americans that eminent Senators such as George Aiken, William Fulbright and Mike Mansfield, as well as retired General James Gavin and foreign policy expert George Kennan, had developed serious misgivings

---

<sup>6</sup> A cursory examination of the reasons why these men did not offer leadership to the anti war faction highlights the difficulty faced in organizing an effective anti war bloc in the Senate. Fulbright was largely regarded as a loner in the Senate, as well he regarded opposition to the war as a personal decision to be arrived at separately by each Senator. Mansfield, as Majority Leader, had to concern himself, to a large degree, with working with the White House on many other issues and a clear, irrevocable break with Johnson would prove debilitating to the enactment of significant legislation. Robert Kennedy, meanwhile, was concerned with his role as the country's opposition in waiting, and he jealously protected his political power, often bypassing the Senate's rules and traditions in an effort to garner favourable attention to himself.

<sup>7</sup> Herring, p. 172.

about the American presence in South Vietnam. The hearings gave reasoned dissent a measure of respectability as well as an unprecedented television forum for airing anti-war sentiment. Although most members of the Senate's peace bloc were unwilling to directly associate themselves with the anti-war movement, and continued to work within the confines of the American political system, their dissent was a sign of the depth of disagreement over Vietnam policy in American society. Aiken's presence on the committee added a further element of legitimacy to the movement. His standing as a solid member of the Republican Party revealed that elements of dissent existed within both major political parties. This bipartisan approach to changing American policy was illustrated by the Aiken/Mansfield relationship. The two men used their reputations as moderate members of their respective parties to influence the views of many of their colleagues. The fact that the Majority Leader and the senior Republican member of the Senate continued to speak out against escalation of the war lent an impartial air to dissent in that august body. Eventually, a majority of the Senate would join with Aiken and Mansfield in opposing the war, finally voting to cut off funding for military activities in Southeast Asia. George Aiken's effort to offer a Republican voice to Senate dissent was a key element in this reassertion of congressional prerogative in foreign affairs.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Daily Diary of President Johnson, 1963-1969. Microfilm. Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1980.

George David Aiken Papers, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont.

Lyndon Johnson Papers, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

Michael Mansfield Papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

### INTERVIEWS

Aiken, George. Interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, October 10, 1968. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Church, Frank. Interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, May 1, 1969. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Dirksen, Everett. Interview with William S. White, May 8, 1968. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Gruening, Ernest. Interview with Joe B. Frantz, April 23, 1974. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Hickenlooper, Bourke. Interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, September 19, 1968. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Marks, Leonard. Interview with Joe B. Frantz, January 26, 1976. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

McGee, Gale. Interview with Joe B. Frantz, October 2 and 3, 1969. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

McGovern, George. Interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, April 30, 1969. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Sparkman, John. Interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, October 5, 1968. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

Terry, Stephen. Interview with author, October 31, 1997.

Wheeler, Earle. Interview with Dorothy Pierce McSweeney, August 21, 1969. LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.

## GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

*Committee on Foreign Relations, Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966-Vietnam.* Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., S. Rept. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

*Congressional Record*, January 1, 1964- December 31, 1968.

*Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 1964, Vol. XVI, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987.

*Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 1965, Vol. XVII, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990.

*Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 1966, Vol. XVIII, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993

Mansfield, Michael, Edmund Muskie, Daniel Inouye, George Aiken, and J. Caleb Boggs, *The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and the Shadow*. U.S. 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., S. Rept. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

## BOOKS

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Nixon – Volume Two: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972*. New York. Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Aiken, George David. *Aiken: Senate Diary, January 1972-January 1975*. Brattleboro, Vermont: The Stephen Greene Press, 1976.

Ashby, Larry and Rod Gramer. *Fighting The Odds: The Life and Times of Senator Frank Church*. Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1994.

Ball, George W. *The Past Has Another Pattern--Memoirs*. New York: Norton, 1982.

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

—. *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisers*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993.

Berman, Larry. *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.

—. *Planning A Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982.

Berman, William C. *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988.

Bryan, Frank M. *Yankee Politics In Rural Vermont*. Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1974.

Burke, John P. and Fred I. Greenstein. *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisionmaking on Vietnam, 1954 to 1965*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989.



- Burns, Richard Dean. *The Wars In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, 1945-1982*. Oxford: Regina Books, 1984.
- Carter, Christie, ed. *Vermont Elections 1789-1989*. Montpelier, Vermont: State Papers of Vermont, 1989.
- Clifford, Clark. *Counsel To The President*. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Davidson, Phillip B. *Vietnam At War*. Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988.
- DeBenedetti, Charles and Charles Chatfield, assisting author. *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam War*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990.
- Dietz, Terry. *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961-1968*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Doyle, William. *The Vermont Political Tradition: And Those Who Helped Make It*. Barre, Vermont: Northlight Studio Press, 1984.
- Drukman, Mason. *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography*. Portland, Oregon: The Oregon Historical Society Press, 1997.
- Fitzgerald, Frances. *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1972.
- Fulbright, J. William. *The Arrogance of Power*. New York: Vantage Books, 1966.
- Gardner, Lloyd C. *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995.
- Gelb, Leslie H. and Richard K. Betts. *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*. Washington: Brookings Institution, 1979.
- Gibbons, William Conrad. *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986-1995. 4 vols.
- Gilbert, Marc Jason and William Head, eds. *The Tet Offensive*. Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 1996.
- Goldsmith, John A. *Colleagues: Richard B. Russell and his Apprentice, Lyndon B. Johnson*. Washington: Seven Locks Press, 1993.
- Gravel, Michael, ed. *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. 4 vols.
- Gruening, Ernest. *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening*. New York: Liveright, 1973.
- Halbertsma, David. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Random House, 1969.
- . *The Powers That Be*. New York: Knopf, 1979.
- Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.
- Humphrey, Hubert H. *The Education of a Public Man: My Life and Times*. New York: Doubleday, 1976.
- Javits, Jacob K. *Javits: The Autobiography of a Public Man*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981.
- Johnson, George W. *The Johnson Presidential Press Conferences*. New York: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, Inc., Publishers, 1978.

- Johnson, Lyndon Baines. *The Vantage Point-Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*. Trowbridge & London: Redwood Press Limited, 1971.
- Kahin, George McT. *Intervention: How American became Involved in Vietnam*. New York: Knopf, 1986.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: The Viking Press, 1983.
- Kearns, Doris. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- Levy, David. *The Debate Over Vietnam*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Liechtenstein, Nelson, ed. *Political Profiles: The Johnson Years*. New York: Facts on File, 1976.
- Lomperis, Timothy J. *The War Everyone Lost—And Won*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984.
- McGovern, George. *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern*. New York: Random House, 1977.
- McNamara, Robert S. with Brian VanDeMark. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Morrissey, Charles T. and D. Gregory Sanford. *That Man From Vermont—George David Aiken, An Oral History Memoir*. Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, 1981.
- Olson, Gregory Allen. *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University press, 1995.
- Reeves, Richard. *President Kennedy—Profile of Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- Rusk, Dean, as told to Richard Rusk. *As I Saw It*. New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1990.
- Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. *The Imperial Presidency*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973.
- . *Robert Kennedy and His Times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978.
- Sherman, Michael, ed. *The Political Legacy of George Aiken: Wise Old Owl of the U.S. Senate*. Woodstock, Vermont: The Countryman Press in association with the Vermont Historical Society, 1995.
- Small, Melvin. *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- Summers Jr., Harry G. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*. Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982.
- VanDeMark, Brian. *Into The Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- White, Theodore H. *The Making of the President 1964*. Toronto: The New American Library of Canada, 1965.
- . *The Making of the President 1968*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969.

Witcover, Jules. *85 Days: The Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy*. New York: William Morrow, 1969.

Woods, Randall Bennett. *Fulbright: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

### SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

Divine, Robert A. "Vietnam Reconsidered." *Diplomatic History*, Winter 1988.

Hess, Gary R. "The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War." *Diplomatic History*, Summer 1994.

O'Brien, Charles F. "Aiken and Vietnam: A Dialogue with Vermont Voters." *Vermont History*, 1993.

Stoler, Mark A. "Aiken, Mansfield and the Tonkin Gulf Crisis: Notes from the Congressional leadership Meeting at the White House." *Vermont History*, 1982.

—. "What Did He Really Say? The 'Aiken Formula' for Vietnam Revisited." *Vermont History*, Spring 1978.

### MAGAZINE AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

"Aiken, Once Critic, Now Praises Nixon." *The New York Times*, August 10, 1968.

"Aiken Says Chinese Are 'Winning' Vietnam War." *The New York Times*, December 21, 1965.

Apple Jr., R. W. "Morton Will Accept Role In Leadership of Rockefeller Race." *The New York Times*, March 20, 1968.

"Back From Saigon, Mansfield Supports Johnson Peace Aims." *The New York Times*, December 19, 1965.

Belair Jr., Felix. "Senators Assail U.S. Aid To Congo." *The New York Times*, July 11, 1967.

"Can The Reds Be Beaten?" *Newsweek*, January 6, 1964.

"Change of Heart." *Newsweek*, April 3, 1967.

"Democrats: McCarthy or McCoy?" *Newsweek*, December 11, 1967.

"Dienbienphu: Could It Happen Again?" *Time*, May 15, 1964.

"Excerpts From exchanges Between Katzenbach and Senators." *The New York Times*, August 18, 1967.

"Excerpts From G.O.P. Paper on War." *The New York Times*, May 2, 1967.

"Excerpts From Text of Kennedy's Speech." *The New York Times*, February 9, 1968.

Finney, John W. "Fulbright to Hold New Hearings To Review Commitments of U.S." *The New York Times*, January 17, 1967.

—. "Fulbright Query Attacked By Rusk." *The New York Times*, February 16, 1968.

—. "Javits Wants Aim of War Redefined." *The New York Times*, September 30, 1967.

- . "Johnson Assailed in Senate by Case for War Conduct." *The New York Times*, September 27, 1967.
- . "Senate Unit Asks A Congress Role in Sending Troops." *The New York Times*, November 17, 1967.
- . "War Doubts in Senate." *The New York Times*, February 12, 1968.
- "Foreign Policy: Growing Dissent." *Newsweek*, March 25, 1968.
- "A Fretful Congress Confronts Vietnam." *Newsweek*, January 17, 1966.
- "Fulbright's Dilemma." *Newsweek*, August 28, 1967.
- "Fulbright Offers Plan To End War." *The New York Times*, January 22, 1967.
- "GI's Pour In--And The War Looks Up." *Newsweek*, October 4, 1965.
- "Goldwater Is 'Shocked' by Fulbright's Peace Plan." *The New York Times*, January 24, 1967.
- "The Great What-Is It." *Newsweek*, May 15, 1967.
- Herbers, John. "Controversial Report on Vietnam Seems Shelved by G.O.P. Chiefs." *The New York Times*, May 10, 1967.
- . "Fulbright Backs Vietnam Limit of 500,000 G.I.'s." *The New York Times*, March 1, 1967.
- . "Fulbright Requests Senate To Reassert Foreign Policy Role." *The New York Times*, August 1, 1967.
- . "Hatfield, Percy and Brooke Delight Senate G.O.P." *The New York Times*, April 17, 1967.
- . "Occupation: Farmer. Avocation: Senator." *The New York Times Magazine*, January 29, 1967.
- . "Senate Pledges Johnson Support in Limiting War." *The New York Times*, March 2, 1967.
- . "6 Senators Warn president on War." *The New York Times*, May 16, 1967.
- "Johnson Popularity on Upswing, Year-End Gallup Poll Discloses." *The New York Times*, December 31, 1967.
- "Kennedy Discussion with Johnson Bitter, A Time Article Says." *The New York Times*, March 14, 1967.
- Kenworthy, E. W. "Debate Over Vietnam Policy--And Views of Key Senators." *The New York Times*, June 6, 1965.
- . "15 In Senate Urge President Extend Pause In Bombing." *The New York Times*, January 28, 1966.
- . "Mansfield Report Seen As Urging U.S. To Get Peace Pact Quickly." *The New York Times*, January 9, 1966.
- . "Most in Congress Relieved By The President's Course." *The New York Times*, July 29, 1965.
- . "Senators Reluctantly Back President on Air Strikes." *The New York Times*, February 1, 1966.
- . "Vietnam Policy Divides The G.O.P." *The New York Times*, May 3, 1967.
- "Mansfield Report: Real danger of Bigger War." *U.S. News & World Report*, January 17, 1966.

"March On The Pentagon." *Newsweek*, October 30, 1967.

"A Measured & Fitting Response." *Time*, August 14, 1964.

"Men At War: RFK vs. LBJ." *Newsweek*, March 13, 1967.

Oberdorfer, Dan. "The 'Wobble' on the War on Capitol Hill." *The New York Times Magazine*, December 17, 1967.

"A Path For Reasonable Men." *Newsweek*, April 19, 1965.

"Peace?— Hints, Signs, Hopes." *Newsweek*, February 13, 1967.

"The Platform Leaves Room For Maneuver." *The New York Times*, August 11, 1968.

"The President in Trouble." *Newsweek*, September 4, 1967.

Reston, James. "Washington: Keep Your Eye On The Little Guy." *The New York Times*, April 13, 1967.

"Results of Nationwide Balloting: Composition of Congress; House Vote in City." *The New York Times*, November 8, 1968.

"Rift in Congress Over War Widens." *The New York Times*, March 4, 1967.

"The Road Past North C Pier..." *Newsweek*, June 28, 1965.

"Rockefeller Says He'd Accept Draft." *The New York Times*, February 25, 1968.

Semple Jr., Robert. "Nixon's Delegate Strength Is Believed a Majority Now." *The New York Times*, May 5, 1968.

Sheehan, Neil. "Fulbright Doubts Congress Repeal of Tonkin Gulf Resolution." *The New York Times*, August 21, 1967.

—. "Peace Called Aim." *The New York Times*, November 1, 1968.

—. "Senate G.O.P. Study Calls U.S. War Role Error By Democrats." *The New York Times*, May 2, 1967.

Smith, Hedrick. "Kennedy Asks Suspension Of U.S. Air Raids on North; Administration Unmoved." *The New York Times*, March 3, 1967.

—. "Morton Assails Johnson on War." *The New York Times*, September 28, 1967.

—. "Stennis Calls For Stepped Up Air Raids In North." *The New York Times*, January 21, 1967.

—. "Symington Asks Wider Air Raids In North Vietnam." *The New York Times*, March 27, 1967.

"Talking of Peace." *The New Republic*, April 17, 1965.

"Taylor Completes Washington Talks; Sees Tough Fight." *The New York Times*, June 12, 1965.

"Text of McNamara Statement to Senate Subcommittee on Bombing in Vietnam." *The New York Times*, August 26, 1967.

"Transcript of the President's Address on the Vietnam War and his Political Plans." *The New York Times*, April 1, 1968.

"Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Affairs." *The New York Times*, August 19, 1967.

"Uneasy Flights for Senate Doves." *The New York Times*, September 29, 1968.

"Vietnam: Never Grimmer. Chaos in Saigon. Uncertainty in Washington." *Newsweek*, December 7, 1964.

"Vietnam: Still on the Escalator." *Newsweek*, December 13, 1965.

"Vietnam: Time For Reappraisal?" *Life*, May 29, 1964.

"Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War'." *Newsweek*, August 17, 1964.

"The War No One Wants—Or Can End." *Newsweek*, August 9, 1965.

Weaver Jr., Warren. "G.O.P. Leaders Say Only Rockefeller Can Beat Johnson." *The New York Times*, January 1, 1968.

—. "McCarthy to Fight Johnson Policies in 5 or 6 Primaries." *The New York Times*, December 1, 1967.

Wicker, Tom. "Kennedy Asserts U.S. Cannot Win." *The New York Times*, February 9, 1968.

Wolfson, Lewis W. "George Aiken: He Prunes When The Saw Is Sharp." *The Rhode Islander*, August 6, 1967.

#### UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

Zelman, Walter A. "Senate Dissent and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968." Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1971.