

THE RHETORIC OF THE PRESS:
NEWSPAPER TREATMENT OF RICHARD NIXON'S
MAJOR STATEMENTS ON VIETNAM, 1969-1970

by

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Submitted to the Department of Speech
and Drama and to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of
Kansas in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all who helped me in the completion of this project, most notably: my committee, Dr. Donn Parson, Dr. Wil Linkugel, and particularly, Dr. David Berg, my chairman, all of whom represent the stimulating and supportive climate of the Speech Communication Division at the University of Kansas; the staffs of several libraries, without whom research would be impossible; my family--my husband, my mother, and my father--whose encouragement, patience, and love can never be measured, only accepted with gratitude.

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CHAPTER I

A DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

When Richard Nixon took office as President of the United States on January 20, 1969, he faced several difficult political situations. Among the most important of these was the long and increasingly unpopular Vietnam War. Determined that it would not become "Nixon's war," he continued his commitment to a campaign promise of an "honorable peace," which formulated into a policy of slow withdrawal of American troops while building the strength of the South Vietnamese army. This basic policy did not change through Nixon's first two years in office. As he himself stated it, his rhetorical problem became the establishing and maintaining of public support and satisfaction through the long withdrawal process. Among his strategies was a series of public statements concerning the war in Vietnam, which surely were received by many citizens only through the filter of the American press.

Of concern to the rhetorical critic, and indeed, to the American public, is the question, how accurately did the press transmit Nixon's statements? Was it simply an unbiased channel functioning in the communication process? What, if any, modification or distortion occurred in the in-

tended message? Did the press itself become a rhetorical agent through its coverage of the President's statements?

Public officials, except in direct communication situations, have long been at the mercy of those who report the news to convey their message to the people. Even when a statement is available in full, as in a television broadcast, many Americans depend entirely on a reporting of the message for the content and/or an analysis of it. Despite reporters' claims to objective news reporting, increasing skepticism has grown concerning unbiased coverage. More and more the rhetorical powers of the media are becoming apparent. Reporting involves selection, selection involves choice, and choice, by its nature, is rhetorical.

The issue emerged in full force in November, 1969, when then Vice President Spiro Agnew attacked what he perceived as unfair coverage of the government position by television and the press. It was not a new idea. President Lyndon Johnson had blamed the Eastern Press for his political unpopularity, and, eventually, President Nixon added his criticism of "biased" reporting in March, 1971. These accusations were followed by denials from the media. But public trust had been shaken.

To examine the place of the press in the rhetorical process, this study will analyze two newspapers' treatment of one man's statements about one subject. Richard Nixon's Vietnam policy was chosen because its importance in national affairs resulted in extended newspaper coverage.

The study was limited to the first two years of Nixon's term of office because whereas the State of the Union message in 1970 listed Vietnam as the top priority, by 1971, the Administration was acting as though the war had virtually ended. The prisoner of war issue was to become more prominent, but even this is an indication that the war was winding down, for POW's become the greatest concern at the end of a war. So, even though thousands of American troops remained in Vietnam in 1971, the President turned his attention to domestic and more pressing international problems.

Nixon made a number of public statements concerning Vietnam during his first two years in office. From these, twenty-three speeches, news conferences, and statements were selected,¹ those which devoted themselves exclusively to the war, or those in which the major portion of the content concerned the war. Although Nixon's basic policy on Vietnam did not change during this period, he used public statements to explicate that policy, to announce its activation, to adapt it to the progress of the war, and to maintain public support. An analysis^v of Richard Nixon's rhetorical strategy in these twenty-three statements is presented in Chapter II.

The newspapers selected for examination were the two most often included in the term "Eastern Press:" The New York Times and The Washington Post. The Times is perhaps the most important newspaper in the United States today. Not

¹See Appendix I.

only is it third largest in daily circulation (nearly 900,000 in 1969),² but it holds a unique place in journalistic society. For it affects not only the public who read The Times, but it also serves as source and opinion leader for other newspapers across the country and the world.

William L. Rivers cites The New York Times as influencing 87.5% of the nation's newspapers.³ Herman Dinsmore, a former editor of The Times can quite accurately say, "As The Times goes, so goes a large part of the nation's press."⁴

In addition, The Times has set for itself the task of recorder of history,⁵ which accounts, in part, for the tremendous size of this newspaper. Thus the implication here is that a researcher in some future time should be able to go to The Times and find nearly all pertinent data concerning an event. Perhaps because of its reputation, its importance, and its influence, The New York Times should, above all other newspapers, set for itself standards of objectivity in reportage and evaluation of news events.

The Washington Post is also an extremely important newspaper. With a circulation of nearly 490,000 in

²Encyclopedic Almanac 1971, ed. Lee Foster, (New York: New York Times, 1970).

³William L. Rivers, The Opinion Makers: The Washington Press Corps (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1967), p. 54.

⁴Herman H. Dinsmore, All the News that Fits: A Critical Analysis of the News and Editorial Contents of The New York Times (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), p. 20.

⁵Ibid., p. 8; Mitchell V. Charnley, Reporting (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 20.

1969,⁶ Rivers lists it as second only to The Times in influence, being read by 69.6% of all other journalists.⁷ (Another Washington paper, The Washington Star is third at 47.1%.) The Post is also important because of its location in the nation's capitol.

Yet both these papers have been accused in recent years of bias--often by the Nixon Administration, including former Vice President Spiro Agnew⁸ and James Keogh,⁹ former Nixon speech writer. But even a journalist, Herman Dinsmore, has indicted The Times:

The New York Times today is deliberately pitched to the so-called liberal point of view, both in its news and editorial columns. Although The Times still prints a large body of news, it is not as objective in its news as it was when it was making its name as the finest newspaper in the world.¹⁰

Are these charges justified? It was hoped an examination of these two newspapers' coverage of the major statements of Richard Nixon on Vietnam would provide an answer.

The Times was examined for its coverage of all twenty-three of the major statements made by the President on Vietnam during 1969 and 1970. It was then determined that the

⁶Encyclopedic Almanac 1971.

⁷Rivers, p. 54.

⁸Spiro Agnew, "Speech About News Media at Montgomery, Alabama, on November 20, 1969," reproduced in James Keogh, President Nixon and the Press (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1972), pp. 199-204.

⁹Keogh, 212 pp.

¹⁰Dinsmore, p. 13.

most significant statements in terms of newspaper coverage were limited to twelve.¹¹ Thus only these twelve were included in the examination of The Washington Post coverage.

The research design called for an examination of the newspapers three days prior to and at least one week (including the Sunday coverage) following one of the President's major statements on Vietnam. All articles directly related to the event were noted according to content, placement in the paper, number of column inches used, headlines, by-lines, etc. (Non-verbal coverage--photos, cartoons, etc.--were not included, because these would require a different kind of analysis.) The news and editorial sections of the newspaper were examined page by page. The articles were judged to be favorable (in agreement with the statement), unfavorable (critical or in opposition to the statement), or neutral (straight reporting of news, or with both a pro and con evaluation of the statement), according to the content. These judgments were made by both evaluation of the ideas and by opinions in the article, and by the use of emotionally charged words.

Because this is a little-explored field in rhetorical analysis, no established methodology for research exists. Thus, following the thinking of such critics as Phillip

¹¹See Appendix II.

Tompkins¹² and Wayne Brockriede¹³ who advocate an examination of a complete rhetorical act and then a focus on what is unique, rather than a utilization of a "cookie-cutter" approach, a content analysis was used. It soon became apparent that certain types of newspaper treatment began to emerge, appearing frequently enough to be considered significant. These three general areas, amount of coverage, emphasis and context, and interpretative reporting, make up the bulk of this analysis and appear as Chapters III, IV, and V. It was also discovered that these three areas are consistent with journalism theory, making up an important part of that discipline.

The last chapter, VI, is an attempt to summarize and interpret the findings of the preceding chapters.

Thus, the analysis will consider President Richard Nixon and his message, the Eastern Press and its message, and the interrelationships and interdependencies of the two. Hopefully, as a result the rhetorical dimension of the press will become clearer.

¹²Phillip K. Tompkins, "The Rhetorical Criticism of Non-Oratorical Works," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55 (December, 1969), pp. 431-439.

¹³Wayne E. Brockriede, "Dimensions of the Concept of Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 54 (February, 1968), pp. 1-12.

CHAPTER II

NIXON'S RHETORICAL CAMPAIGN

Among the pledges Richard Milhouse Nixon made to his party and to his country when he accepted the Republican nomination for President of the United States in 1968, was, should he be elected, "to bring an honorable end to the war in Vietnam." Further, he promised, "We shall not stop there--we need a policy to prevent more Vietnams."¹ Certainly a central issue to a nation weary of a four-year-old war which threatened to continue indefinitely, the promise to end the war "honorably" remained an important part of Nixon's campaign.

Nevertheless, Nixon never fully explained to the American public what his plan to end the war would be. At best he made statements such as, "I would put far greater emphasis . . . on the training of the South Vietnamese to fight their own battles," and, "A settlement which respects both the territorial and political integrity of South Vietnam to chose its own way--that would be an honorable settlement."² Usually, however, his statements concerning Vietnam, perhaps typical of political campaigns, were ambiguous: "We must seek a

¹"Transcripts of Acceptance Speeches by Nixon and Agnew to the G.O.P. Convention," New York Times, August 9, 1968, p. 20.

²Quoted in "The Promises That Nixon Has Made," U. S. News and World Report, 66 (March 3, 1969), p. 52.

negotiated settlement of the war;" It must be "ended honorably" in such a way that "will not require a new American intervention in Asia in a few months or years;" If peace talks are unsuccessful, "new approaches both to the conduct of the war and to the search for peace will be needed."³ Thus, the nation waited anxiously as Richard Nixon took office on January 20, 1969, for the revelation of the plan for an honorable peace.

The Vietnam War, it has often been said, is like no other in United States history. Our involvement, based on the assumption that America would fight Communism wherever it threatened, was gradual, almost unnoticed, until it suddenly blossomed into a full-scale war with a U.S. fighting force of over 500,000 men. Public opinion became so divided concerning justification for being in the war, the cost of the war, particularly in American lives, the conduct of the war, the ways of ending the war, that President Lyndon Johnson, branded with the stigma of "Johnson's War," decided not to seek reelection to a second term, declaring his hope that his withdrawal would serve as a stimulus to the peace talks which began in Paris in 1968. It was a difficult situation then that Nixon faced as he took over the office of the Presidency. His problem was not only political, dealing with Vietnam itself, but rhetorical as well, requiring that he rally and unite public opinion behind a single course of action.

³Ibid.

This chapter will examine Nixon's rhetorical strategy in dealing with the problem of Vietnam. It should be noted that the war was one of several extremely serious issues confronting the new President. The Presidency involves a myriad of complex political problems, each inextricably bound to the others. A major problem in 1969, for example, was the divisiveness of the country. Although this was caused in part by the differing opinions on Vietnam, it also involved such issues as black-white relationships, problems created by increasing crime, and the emerging "youth culture." An attempt to separate one issue from the others, therefore, may oversimplify and distort the problem. Nevertheless, it is only by this method that insight can be gained into the rhetorical strategies used by President Nixon concerning the particular issue of Vietnam.

Nixon's Purpose

Nixon, then, had a two-fold goal. He wanted to achieve an "honorable peace" in Vietnam, which, in turn, would keep the U.S. out of similar involvement, and he had to gain public support for his plan. Our Vietnam policy could not continue indefinitely on the same course; the American public would not stand for it. They wanted victory or withdrawal. Nixon recognized this and listed it as the "first priority foreign policy objective" in his acceptance speech. If Nixon were to succeed as President of the United States, he would have to find some solution for this foreboding problem.

Nixon, thus, stood to gain personally from a resolution of the Vietnam war. Perhaps, for him, the greatest reward would be personal satisfaction. It becomes apparent in Richard Nixon's book, Six Crises, that he feels a strong commitment to the job of the Presidency. The book also reveals Nixon's strong ego. His dedication to and satisfaction from his job is closely linked to his confidence in himself. To him, crisis is challenge:

A man who has never lost himself in a cause bigger than himself has missed one of life's mountaintop experiences. Only in losing himself does he find himself. Only then does he discover all the latent strengths he never knew he had and which otherwise would have remained dormant.

Crisis can indeed be agony. But it is the exquisite agony which a man might not want to experience again--yet would not for all the world have missed.⁴

Surely an "unsolvable" problem such as Vietnam, indeed the Presidency itself, would serve as such a challenge to Richard Nixon.

Success in Vietnam would, of course, have other personal rewards; the more immediate political rewards are obvious: support for other political decisions, reelection, etc. And every President must care about how history will view his effectiveness. Nixon has said, "I think we would all agree that there is no nobler destiny, nor any greater gift that one age could make to the ages that follow, than to forge the key

⁴Richard M. Nixon, Six Crises, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), p. xvi.

to a lasting peace;"⁵ and "The greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker."⁶ For Richard Nixon, no title would be more welcome.

Thus the situation when he took office and his own self-concept required that Nixon do something about Vietnam. The New Republic summarized the point: "Self-interest and events are pushing Mr. Nixon, we guess, toward some sort of a settlement in Vietnam, and maybe toward some relaxation of tension with Moscow and Peking, too. It's a fine story-line and we can't put the book down."⁷

The second half of Nixon's goal, closely bound to the first, was that Nixon had to gain public support for his method of extracting the U.S. from Vietnam. Nixon assumed, probably accurately, that the public already wanted out of Vietnam so that the U.S. could devote its energies to the task of improving the quality of American life. Nation, in evaluating his Inaugural Speech commented, "From the President's point of view, the address is politically astute. He has made what well may be a shrewd assessment of the mood currently prevailing in white middle-class America, namely a desire for peace, quiet and more 'affluence.'" But, as Nation goes on to say:

⁵U.S., President, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1971), Richard Nixon, 1969, p. 724.

⁶Ibid., p. 1.

⁷"TRB," New Republic, 160 (February 15, 1969), p. 6.

But sensing a dominant mood is one thing; turning it to good account, making it serve stated political objectives, is something else again. The mood may shift, it may evaporate, it may be impossible to sustain. For the time being, however, Mr. Nixon is probably right to think that current attitudes will support the kind of politics he has in mind: an end to the war in Vietnam, avoidance of similar "brush fire" wars in the future and a more prudent allocation of resources.⁸

Nixon's task then was to sustain the mood of the people, to use it to support his definition of an "honorable peace," to use it to still the critics of his policy and anti-war dissent in general, which, Nixon felt, was being depended on by the enemy to eventually force a U.S. withdrawal. His plan would necessarily take time; public support for the plan would give him that necessary time. Also, success (i.e., public agreement) on one front would allow time to work on other fronts, such as domestic problems. In short, it would provide a political advantage.

So Nixon's two-fold purpose was interdependent and intertwined; he was obligated to end the war, partially because public opinion demanded he do so; yet he needed public support to carry out his plan, and if he convinced the public his plan was successful, he would in turn win further public support. How then did Nixon proceed in accomplishing this rhetorical task?

To understand Nixon's rhetoric, one must first of all understand something about Nixon. His determination, his calm, his aloofness as President can again be explained somewhat by

⁸"The Inaugural," Nation, 208 (February 3, 1969), p. 130.

a reading of Six Crises. Nixon, the politician, has suffered-- and survived--an inordinate number of stressful situations. Some of these, such as the Alger Hiss investigation and the "Fund" incident, have drawn such invective against him that a basic distrust continues to exist in the minds of many Americans. He faced defeats in two major elections. Yet he persevered and was elected President of the United States. In Six Crises, a book written just after his defeat by John Kennedy in 1960, Nixon attempts to draw some generalizations about what he perceives to be his reaction to and handling of a crisis situation. In sum, he says the successful handling of a crisis depends on confidence based on adequacy of preparation, a coolness (serenity) founded on faith, courage resulting from discipline, and experience in crisis situations.⁹ He warns that the most difficult period is indecision, the most dangerous the aftermath. The easiest period is the battle itself. In fact, the reader of Six Crises gets the impression that Nixon derived great stimulation from the fighting of his crises, that he indeed found them an "exquisite agony."¹⁰

We might conclude then that this is the way Nixon faced the Presidency--and the problem of Vietnam. Stewart Alsop in Newsweek reveals letters from Nixon's classmates at Whittier College, who recall him as a lousy football player but one

⁹Nixon, p. xv.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

with perseverance; he learned to take it, to stay with it.

Alsop goes on to comment:

Try to put yourself inside the skin of that lousy football player, now a weather-beaten, much defeated, finally triumphant politician, and you can see why he not only tells all visitors that he is not going to be "the first President to preside over an American defeat," but why he really means it. It is even possible--though these are psychological deep waters--that he sees his Vietnam policy in terms of "getting the hell knocked out of him but staying with it and lettering." After all, that is how he got to be President.¹¹

Nixon's "methodology" for handling crisis situations has carried into his decision-making process as President. He has said repeatedly the final decision is made by the President. So he consults at length with advisers then withdraws to consider and finally make a decision completely alone.¹² This would correspond to the period of indecision, of preparation. But once the decision is made, the battle is launched; then it's a matter of simply carrying it through--with confidence, serenity, and courage.

Apparently this is what happened with Nixon's "battle" over the issue of Vietnam. He made the decision early and then proceeded to carry it through. There is no evidence to suggest Nixon waived from his initial decision; he was not affected by the war itself, by demonstrations, by the tragedy of the

¹¹Stewart Alsop, "The Three Nixons," Newsweek, 74 (October 20, 1969), p. 132.

¹²This procedure is described in detail concerning the Cambodian operation decision in "Richard Nixon's Ten Days," Newsweek, 75 (May 18, 1970), pp. 36+.

Kent State killings, by Senate doves. If the policy "changed," it was simply the announcement, the revelation of more of the plan, rather than a modification of it. When and how the President made those revelations is the rhetoric with which we are concerned.

The Plan to End the War

How and why Nixon chose his particular plan to end the war does not concern us here. Undoubtedly the decision was politically complex, considering commitments to Saigon and other allied countries and commitments to political constituents as well as public opinion and personal preference. We are, however, concerned with what that plan was. Briefly, the plan could be divided into two, certainly not mutually exclusive, alternatives: negotiation and what was later called Vietnamization.

Negotiation was, from the first, Nixon's preferred course of action. Indeed, if the war were to ever end while American troops were involved, it would have to be through negotiation (a military victory had long been ruled out). The Paris peace talks were in process when Nixon took office and he continually expressed hope for those talks, appealing to the enemy to work seriously toward a negotiated settlement. Several issues were matters of concern in the negotiations according to Nixon: mutual withdrawal of foreign forces, exchange of prisoners of war, and, eventually, a cease-fire (the latter, in the beginning, was considered by Nixon to be

nonviable in guerrilla warfare).¹³ The one area which Nixon consistently ruled non-negotiable was in political settlement: he declared South Vietnam must have the right of self-determination by free election (he refused to "overthrow" the Thieu regime although the North Vietnamese repeatedly demanded it).

Although he preferred negotiation, Nixon apparently realized after making several conciliatory gestures to get the peace talks moving seriously (namely the peace proposal of May, 1969, and the Midway announcement of the first U.S. troop withdrawals in June, 1969) that any real progress on that front in any reasonable length of time was unlikely. He knew too that the American public would not allow the state of no-progress to continue much longer. Thus he decided on a plan of Vietnamization which was intended to spur negotiation, but which would result in an end to U.S. involvement even if negotiation failed.

Vietnamization, as it was finally developed, was based on the principle that the United States would aid in the building of strength of the South Vietnamese army (the ARVN) to the point that they could assume the burden of the fighting of the war, thus allowing the U.S. troops to withdraw unilaterally. The process would be gradual; the greater the strength of the ARVN, the fewer U.S. troops would remain. Included in this

¹³See News Conference, January 27, 1969; News Conference, June 19, 1969.

plan was the promise that the U.S. would not escalate the fighting, but would retaliate against increased enemy activity (i.e., the burden of the intensity of combat was on the enemy). Nixon repeatedly¹⁴ stated the speed and success of Vietnamization would depend on three conditions: (1) the enemy offensive, (2) the progress of the Paris peace talks, and (3) the strength of the ARVN forces. As it turned out, the primary factor was the third of these conditions, for the enemy reacted almost not at all to the American plan; they relentlessly demanded complete U.S. withdrawal and the overthrow of the Thieu regime. The peace talks remained virtually at a standstill.

This then was the Nixon plan for an honorable peace in Vietnam. His decision made, the task remained for him to win public support for that plan. He said in a news conference on March 4, 1969:

As far as American public opinion is concerned, I think that the American people will support a President if they are told by the President why we are there, what our objectives are, what the costs will be, and what the consequences would be if we took another course of action. It will not be easy. The American people, I can say from having campaigned the country, are terribly frustrated about this war. They would welcome any initiative that they thought could appropriately bring it to an end on some responsible basis.

On the other hand, it is the responsibility of a President to examine all of the options that we have, and then if he finds that the course he has to take is one that is

¹⁴See News Conference, March 14, 1969; News Conference, April 18, 1969; Midway Announcement, June 8, 1969; News Conference, June 19, 1969; November 3, 1969, Address; December 15, 1969, Address; State of World Remarks, February 18, 1970; April 20, 1970, Address.

not popular, he has to explain it to the American people and gain their support.¹⁵ (Emphasis mine.)

How was Nixon to accomplish this? During the first two years of his Presidency, he made a series of public statements directly related to his policy in Vietnam. The war, of course, had not ended at the end of two years, and it remained an issue to be defended and debated after January, 1971. However, from the viewpoint of the Nixon Administration, the war was ending; the policy was set, only time was needed to play it out (no one was predicting how long that would take; Nixon said in the State of the World report in February, 1971, that the war would end "over a long period"). Nixon had announced commitment to Vietnamization on April 20, 1970.¹⁶ Actions such as the Cambodian operation in May, 1970--attacked by critics as an enlargement of the war and defended by the Administration as consistent with the U.S. pullout--were the responsibility totally of the enemy, and were necessary to protect the lives of the remaining American forces. By 1971, troops had been reduced by more than half, casualties had dropped considerably from the most intense fighting of the war.

The massive demonstrations of the fall of 1969, expressing dissent against the war had virtually disappeared. Criticism still flourished but not with the disruptive force it once had.

¹⁵Public Papers, p. 189.

¹⁶Richard M. Nixon, "Report on Vietnam," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 6 (April 27, 1970), pp. 553-557.

Senate doves concentrated their activity primarily on setting a definite withdrawal date--without success.

In short, at the end of two years of Nixon's administration, the nation--and Nixon--acted as though the Vietnam issue were settled. In a televised conversation with four news commentators January 4, 1971, Nixon reviewed his first two years in office and evaluated foreign policy as the greatest achievement; he stated that an end to the U.S. combat role in Vietnam was in sight.¹⁷ Whereas the State of the Union message in 1970 had listed world peace and a settlement in Vietnam as the first priority of the country, by 1971, it concentrated on domestic reform (welfare, revenue sharing, cancer research, etc.) as though the master plan of the Inaugural Address were progressing: Vietnam was out of the way and the country could begin to improve the quality of life of its citizens.¹⁸ This is not to say Vietnam was settled in 1971, or that, if the war continued, it would not become a major issue in the campaign of 1972--or even 1976. But for the purposes of this analysis, Nixon's first two years do constitute a completed rhetorical strategy concerning public opinion and Vietnam.

The statements of Nixon to be considered include every major Vietnam policy statement or defense of policy statement

¹⁷"Transcript of Four Correspondents' Interview With President at the White House," New York Times, January 5, 1971, p. 20.

¹⁸"Transcript of President's State of the Union Message to Joint Session of Congress," New York Times, January 23, 1971, p. 12.

made during the two year period. They total twenty-three statements:¹⁹ three major addresses incorporating peace proposals; eleven statements, reports, speeches, etc., dealing directly with the war; seven (of the fourteen held) press conferences in which a major portion of the conference was devoted to Vietnam, or in which significant statements were made (new policy, reaction to current events, etc.); the Inaugural Address and an address before the United Nations General Assembly, because they provide some insight into Nixon's overall policy. Undoubtedly every public statement, or indeed every action, by the President or his staff could be analyzed in terms of indirect influence on public opinion related to Vietnam. This analysis, however, will confine itself to these twenty-three statements made by the President.

These twenty-three statements were examined to determine generally what strategies Nixon used to achieve his purpose. Some attempt was made to place them within the context of the situation and the man himself.

The Audience

To determine the strategies, the audience addressed must also be identified. Although some of the statements were made to specific audiences (the Congress, the United Nations, U.S. troops in Vietnam, etc.), it will be assumed that Nixon always had a larger audience in mind, the direct recipients via tele-

¹⁹For complete list and dates, see Appendix I.

vision and radio of the majority of the statements: the American public. For it must be remembered it was his purpose to win and/or maintain their support. Even though Nixon addressed "the enemy" eleven times directly or indirectly in his statements, calling on them to negotiate or warning them against escalation, it is unlikely Hanoi was the "audience," except insofar as a public statement of the policy constituted a commitment on the part of the United States. In other words, every statement made was a message to Hanoi that the U.S. would now adhere to this or that course of action. This, of course, was with the hope that Hanoi would react favorably to the action; however no attempt was made to persuade them, to present arguments.

If the American public was the audience, who then, in fact, constituted the American public? In analyzing the statements, it becomes apparent that early in his presidency Nixon presents a conciliatory attitude, talking to all Americans, working for time for negotiations in Paris to take place. However, once the plan of Vietnamization is launched, it becomes clear that Nixon is not attempting to persuade the anti-war liberal element, the dissenters who advocate immediate and unconditional withdrawal. The November 3 address, perhaps the most significant of the twenty-three statements, can serve as an example. He makes some attempt at conciliation, often through the method of transcendence (i.e., a common goal that "transcends" the differences):

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

.
And now I would like to address a word, if I may, to the young people of this Nation who are particularly concerned, and I understand why they are concerned, about this war.
I respect your idealism.
I share your concern for peace.
I want peace as much as you do.²⁰

Clearly, the President is not to be swayed by dissenting opinions: "I would be untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this Nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that point of view and who try to impose it on the Nation by mounting demonstrations in the street."²¹

The most obvious fact that leads to the conclusion that Nixon is not attempting to win the dovish segment of the public is his failure to argue the issues which are of vital concern to them. For example, his critics think about the moral issue of U.S. involvement in Vietnam; Nixon speaks about U.S. defeat and humiliation. Nation magazine says Nixon praises himself for not taking the easy way of unconditional withdrawal, yet Nation believes the war was such an error, morally and militarily, that it could only be corrected by "painful and humiliating measures."²² New Republic criticizes Nixon for defining the central issue of the war as the right of self-

²⁰Public Papers, p. 908.

²¹Ibid.

²²"Answering Mr. Nixon," Nation, 209 (November 17, 1969), p. 525.

determination for South Vietnam. It counters by arguing that American style "democracy" is not crucial to Vietnam, and if it were, it would not be worth the price of \$30 billions a year and hundreds of thousands of casualties.²³

Because basic assumptions concerning the origin of the war, the reasons for remaining in it, and American responsibility toward Vietnam differed so widely between Nixon and his critics, the latter saw Nixon's position as a continuation of the hawkish Johnson policy, with no end to the war in sight. Characteristic of this position was Peter Steinfels' reaction to Nixon's November 3 address:

And yet Mr. Nixon's speech, longer and more poorly worded, is essentially the same as Mr. Johnson's in 1965. One can correlate them, paragraph by paragraph, point by point: America's justification; America's determination; America's innocent objectives; the peace "gimmick" (a Mekong river project then, secret communications now); and finally the prayerful conclusion.²⁴

To whom then was Nixon speaking? He asked for support from the American people ("The more support I can have . . . , the sooner that pledge [to end the war in a way to win the peace] can be redeemed; for the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate at Paris");²⁵ he asked for unity ("Let us be united for peace. Let us also

²³"Nixon's Non-Plan," New Republic, 161 (November 15, 1969), p. 10.

²⁴Peter Steinfels, "The President's Speech," Commonweal, 91 (November 21, 1969), p. 242.

²⁵Public Papers, p. 909.

be united against defeat"²⁶). Yet by his approach and his definition of "just peace," "defeat," "responsibility," he excluded the liberal element in American thinking. Those who remained, he explicitly named: "And so tonight--to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans--I ask for your support."²⁷ Nixon set out carefully and deliberately to win and to mobilize this large number of "middle Americans" to his cause, particularly after it became obvious that the liberals were not satisfied with his Vietnam policy.

Richard Nixon was elected to the Presidency by a minority of American voters. Thus he began his term with fewer supporters than most Presidents. Still, a growing number of Americans were, in 1968, leaning toward the philosophy of the Republican Party and that of Richard Nixon. This idea is developed in an intriguing book by Kevin Phillips called The Emerging Republican Majority.

Phillips analyzed the voting patterns of the country through history, section by section, and concluded that the liberal Democratic Establishment was fast becoming a minority confined to the northeastern part of the United States, while a Republican majority was indeed emerging. He explained the Wallace movement in 1968, as a transition allowing the conservative, traditionally Democratic (stemming from the Civil War) South to make the switch to Republicanism. Meanwhile,

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

the country as a whole, after the New Deal of the 1930's and 40's, and the Johnsonian Great Society era of the 60's, was reacting against a complex society of increasing social problems: Negro infiltration to the major Northern cities, increased violence and crime, the increasingly liberal attitudes of the young. Thus:

The emerging Republican majority spoke clearly in 1968 for a shift away from the sociological jurisprudence, moral permissiveness, experimental residential, welfare and educational programing and massive federal spending by which the Liberal (mostly Democratic) Establishment sought to propogate liberal institutions and ideology--and all the while reap growing economic benefits. The dominion of this impetus is inherent in the list of Republican-trending groups and potentially Republican Wallace electorates of 1968. . . . Democrats among these groups were principally alienated from their party by its social programs and increasing identification with the Northeastern Establishment and ghetto alike.²⁸

In discussing the "Heartland" of the country, a bastian for Republicanism, Phillips describes the typical attitudes as an interest in agriculture, country life and rural development, a bias toward self-help and the Protestant ethic, a sense of tradition, religion, and history, and a turning away from indiscriminate internationalism and towards less United States involvement abroad.²⁹ Nixon's own projected image reflects and appeals to the attitudes and values of Heartland America. As Hugh Sidney of Time describes it:

He is in a sense the "unheroic" President that Eugene McCarthy urged last fall. Nixon has not heaped promise on

²⁸Kevin P. Phillips, The Emerging Republican Majority (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), p. 471.

²⁹Ibid., p. 292.

promise. He has instead pledged himself to consolidate and manage. He has walked through his role austerely, a man alone much of the time, not posturing or parading, but embracing the "normality" of those middle-class Americans who voted for him. His priorities read neatly-- Vietnam, inflation and crime. Billy Graham's spirituality pervades, the humor is genteel, and the thoughts drape sensibly, like Pat Nixon's wardrobe. The effect in Oklahoma and Colorado and Iowa, if not in the ghettos, is to stimulate faith. . . . He is the family lawyer or the local banker, not necessarily inspiring, but welcome in a time of uncertainty.³⁰

Because the "Sun Belt"--the Southwest and Southern California--is comprised of so many immigrants from the Heartland, seeking a "middle-class promised land," yearning for "bygone, simpler times," it reflects many of the same attitudes.³¹ Consequently, the feelings of the emerging Republican majority toward Vietnam tended to be hawkish. Traditionally Communist-fighters, they saw a reason for U.S. involvement, yet a neo-Isolationist attitude, a general weariness of a war we were neither winning nor losing, and, of course, a simple desire for peace, caused them, like Nixon, to seek an "honorable" end to war. They wanted out--but not at the cost of an American defeat. This thinking results typically in statements such as one made by George Meany, AFL-CIO president:

There's one point, one deep end, I will not go beyond. I will not go with a guy who advocates surrender, and this has nothing to do with the labor movement; it has nothing to do with Nixon. This is me. I will not go with a

³⁰Hugh Sidney, "Nixon's First Quarter," Time, 93 (April 25, 1969), p. 19.

³¹Phillips, p. 444.

fellow running for President of the United States who advocated surrender in Southeast Asia.³²

Phillips concludes by saying that the party who appeals to this emerging Republican majority will be the one to remain in power.

When asked in a press conference whether the theory in Phillips' book represented his own approach toward strengthening the Republican Party, Nixon replied that he didn't believe in writing off any section of the country, that he "attempted to make our appeal nationally, to the South, to the North, the East, the West, and to all groups within the country."³³ However, an analysis of Nixon's public statements, at least concerning Vietnam, shows that Nixon was indeed appealing primarily to and attempting to mobilize this emerging Republican majority.³⁴ Thus, here was the audience for his public statements.

Rhetorical Strategy

Keeping in mind this audience, an analysis of the statements reveals, that although Nixon used a number of strategies and arguments in his rhetoric, he relied primarily on three

³²Kansas City Times, February 14, 1972, p. 1.

³³Public Papers, p. 750.

³⁴Articles supporting this view are: "TRB," New Republic, 160 (January 25, 1969), p. 6; "More Adrenalin," Newsweek, 74 (November 10, 1969), pp. 37-38; "Conciliation, Confrontation," Time, 94 (November 14, 1969), pp. 15-16; "Nixon Turns to the Attack," U.S. News and World Report, 67 (December 1, 1969), pp. 22-24; Kenneth Crawford, "The Nixon Strategy," Newsweek, 74 (December 8, 1969), p. 58; Henry Brandon, "Nixon After the Honeymoon," Saturday Review, 53 (January 24, 1970), pp. 16-18.

to achieve his purpose: an appeal to basic values, a careful timing of the messages, and an overt attempt to polarize his audience.

Basic Values of the Silent Majority. Nixon agreed with some specific attitudes of middle America concerning the war. It should be remembered that under different circumstances, the audience (and perhaps Nixon) would have favored a military victory in Vietnam (of course, a certain faction of the population did cling to this idea). However, the duration of the war without progress despite increasing escalation of the fighting, had made clear that a military victory was unlikely if not impossible, without resorting to a drastic kind of warfare. Nixon spent very little time defending his policy against this alternative. Apparently he decided it was a foregone conclusion that the people agreed with him about this.

Nixon had established an important assumption in his "Nixon Doctrine" of foreign policy, which some interpreted as a return to isolationism. In it he stressed the shifting from the United States to allied nations the main responsibility for developing and defending themselves. As he described in the address before the United Nations:

Now we are maturing together into a new pattern of interdependence.

It is against this background that we have been urging the nations to assume a greater share of responsibility for their own security, both individually and together with their neighbors. . . .

Our aim is to encourage the creative forms of nationalism; to join as partners where our partnership is appropriate, and where it is wanted, but not to let a U.S. presence sub-

stitute for independent national effort or infringe on national dignity and national pride.³⁵

This doctrine is certainly consistent with Vietnamization, and with a philosophy of a people who believe in self-help and a disentanglement from foreign involvement.

Aside from existing attitudes toward foreign policy, Nixon appealed to other basic values held by the silent majority. One of the most important and most frequently used was Nixon's argument that his Vietnamization plan would win a just and lasting peace.

There was no question that the majority of all Americans wanted peace. And peace was the pervading theme throughout the rhetorical campaign. But it was the qualifications put on the kind of peace it would be that appealed to the silent majority rather than to the dissenters. Nixon argued the war must end in such a way as to prevent future wars and the peace must be what he termed "just."

Nixon's thinking was that immediate, unconditional, unilateral withdrawal--precipitate withdrawal--would bring not peace, but more war:

- A nation cannot remain great if it betrays its allies and lets down its friends.
- Our defeat and humiliation in South Vietnam without question would promote recklessness in the councils of those great powers who have not yet abandoned their goals of world conquest.
- This would spark violence wherever our commitments help maintain the peace--in the Middle East, in Berlin, eventually even in the Western Hemisphere.³⁶

³⁵Public Papers, p. 725.

³⁶Ibid., p. 903.

This was an issue that was seemingly of no concern to the doves. They argued that the war was wrong and had to be ended. Period. But for middle America, a just peace was a lasting peace.

Nixon repeatedly (in each of the final eleven statements included in this study) used the term "just" peace, but seldom defined exactly what he meant by it. Aside from it meaning "lasting," he said in June, 1970, that the end of the war must bring an "era of reconciliation to our people--and not an era of furious recrimination."³⁷ And finally, in July, 1970, he said by just peace he meant "not victory over North Vietnam . . . but it is simply the right of the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future without having us impose our will upon them, or the North Vietnamese, or anybody else outside impose their will upon them."³⁸ In short, for Nixon, "just peace" meant Nixon's Vietnamization program; but the phrase was seldom defined, and in its ambiguity, could easily strike a responsive chord in the silent majority. Of course, America wanted a "just peace."

A second appeal Nixon made to established values of middle America was to responsibility--responsibility to selves and responsibility to commitments. This argument took many forms: an appeal to American pride, an appeal to selflessness, an appeal to confidence, and conversely, an appeal to avoid humil-

³⁷Richard M. Nixon, "The Cambodian Sanctuary Operation," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 6 (June 8, 1970), p. 724.

³⁸Richard M. Nixon, "The Cambodian Operation," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 6 (July 6, 1970), p. 864.

iation, defeat, and weakness. Nixon had a difficult problem here in that he wanted out of the war (as did most Americans), but for the first time the United States would not emerge from a war having accomplished its goal. Because of pride or whatever, the withdrawal from the war must not seem like a defeat, for, Nixon argued, a precipitate withdrawal would weaken the "prestige" of the United States in the world, the respect for its integrity in "defending its principles and meeting its obligations," and hence the hopes for peace in the world: "If we simply abandoned our effort in Vietnam, the cause of peace might not survive the damage that would be done to other nations' confidence in our reliability."³⁹ Here again is an example of the difference between the doves and the silent majority. The former were not concerned with face-saving, the latter were.

And it must not seem as if the United States were abandoning South Vietnam (the consequences of which were forcefully painted by Nixon in his November 3 address). Traditionally America was the protector of freedom in the world. Nixon explained:

We have not turned away from the world. We know that with power goes responsibility. We are neither boastful of our power, nor apologetic about it. We recognize that it exists, and that, as well as conferring certain advantages, it also imposes upon us certain obligations.⁴⁰

But he went on to say, "As the world changes, the pattern of those obligations and responsibilities changes."⁴¹ The Nixon

³⁹Public Papers, p. 370.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 725.

⁴¹Ibid.

Doctrine as exemplified by Vietnamization, allowed the United States to be content in its fulfillment of responsibility and at the same time withdraw from a war it was not winning. There was no reliance by Nixon on the domino theory that Johnson had espoused--no talk of saving the world from Communism by saving South Vietnam. This became explicit as Nixon offered a coalition government in South Vietnam, a government which reflected "the existing relationship of political forces within South Vietnam."⁴² At the same time, Nixon was adamant about free elections because he was convinced Communist rule would never come about through the free choice of the people.⁴³ Thus the responsibility implicitly remained. Only once did Nixon state it explicitly, and this was late in the rhetorical campaign:

Now I know there are those who say the domino theory is obsolete. They haven't talked to the dominoes. They should talk to the Thais, to the Malaysians, to the Singaporeans, to the Indonesians, to the Filipinos, to the Japanese, and the rest. And if the United States leaves Vietnam in a way that we are humiliated or defeated, not simply speaking in what is called jingoistic terms, but in very practical terms, this will be immensely discouraging to the 300 million people from Japan clear around to Thailand in free Asia, and even more important it will be ominously encouraging to the leaders of Communist China and the Soviet Union who are supporting the North Vietnamese. It will encourage them in their expansionist policies in other areas.⁴⁴

In part, this American responsibility had to serve as a justification for the lives already lost, the years of war

⁴²Richard M. Nixon, "Report on Vietnam," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 6 (April 27, 1970), p. 555.

⁴³"Cambodia Operation," p. 864.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 863

already spent. It had to justify the sacrifice Americans had made and would make for, as Nixon called it, a selfless purpose: "History will record that never have America's fighting men fought more bravely for more unselfish goals than our men in Vietnam. It is our responsibility to see that they have not fought in vain."⁴⁵

As time went on and more of the Vietnamization plan was revealed with its accompanying concessions, the appeal to responsibility shifted more to "pride," to self-sacrifice, to reminding the country just how far the United States had been willing to go in the cause of peace. In nearly every statement⁴⁶ Nixon reviewed the record of what the U.S. and his Administration had done to further a settlement in Vietnam. He repeatedly said the U.S. had "opened the door to peace." He stressed the willingness to negotiate, the flexibility of his own peace proposals. He called his program "a peace offer which is as generous as any made in the history of warfare."⁴⁷ This was contrasted with the enemy's failure to do anything: thus he shifted the responsibility for the continuence of the war to Hanoi. When the United States did escalate fighting

⁴⁵Public Papers, p. 371.

⁴⁶See May 14, 1969, Address; News Conference, June 19, 1969; Remarks in Vietnam, July 30, 1969; September 16, 1969, Announcement; Address Before the United Nations, September 18, 1969; News Conference, September 26, 1969; November 3, 1969, Address; State of World Remarks, February 18, 1970; April 20, 1970, Address; April 30, 1970, Address; Cambodian Report, June 3, 1970; Cambodian Report, June 30, 1970; T. V. Conversation, July 1, 1970.

⁴⁷Public Papers, p. 586.

(e.g., the Cambodian operation), it was only because Nixon had a responsibility to protect American lives (when the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was rescinded by the Senate in June, 1970, Nixon gave as legal justification for continuing the war the right and the responsibility of the President under the Constitution to protect the lives of American men).⁴⁸ This protection of American lives argument was used only in six of the later statements, after American casualties had been significantly reduced.

Thus by using the "just peace" argument and the "responsibility" argument, Nixon juxtaposed his Vietnamization plan with basic values traditionally held by Americans, and in fact undoubtedly held by his silent majority. The principles of balance theory⁴⁹ would indicate this would win favorable support for Nixon's plan for Vietnamization.

Timing. The second strategy Nixon used to win support for his plan for Vietnamization was the timing of his messages. As was stated earlier in this chapter, the total plan was appar-

⁴⁸"A Conversation with the President on Foreign Policy," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 6 (July 6, 1970), p. 863.

⁴⁹After the balance theory of Fritz Heider (The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958) and the congruity model of Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci, and Percy Tannenbaum (The Measurement of Meaning, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957), it is believed that when two inconsistent attitudes come into a unit relationship, there is a cognitive strain to make them consistent, balanced, congruent, requiring a change in one or both of the attitudes. Thus, when Nixon linked the basic values, favorable terms, and Vietnamization, a neutral or unfavorable term, he hoped to make the public attitude toward Vietnamization more favorable.

ently established early in Nixon's Administration, but it was revealed to the American public in stages, as attitudes and events were deemed appropriate. Thus it might be said that the exigence⁵⁰ for Nixon's overall Vietnam rhetoric was consistently the need to fulfill his purpose of winning support for Vietnamization, while the exigencies for the various particular statements were events which demanded or invited a public comment or a revelation of Nixon's Vietnam plan--always with the purpose of winning or maintaining support for that plan. The plan had to be disclosed gradually because it represented a reversal of two long-established principles, the willingness to allow a Communist regime or a coalition regime including Communists in the Saigon government, and a unilateral withdrawal of American troops without victory. As John Osborne states it, the American public had to be conditioned for Vietnamization. Osborne goes on to speculate that Nixon's policy was not changing but simply being revealed gradually, not only to try to bring the enemy to terms while reducing military pressure, but to win the American people:

When he first detailed his "generous and reasonable peace offer" in May, 1969, the President emphatically ruled out "a one-sided withdrawal from Vietnam" and proposed mutual American and North Vietnamese withdrawal "on a mutually agreed timetable." Nevertheless the "one-sided withdrawal" no-win process was contemplated from the first and was publicly added, at Midway Island, to the Kissinger design

⁵⁰Exigence, according to Bitzer, is a constituent of the rhetorical situation; it is an imperfection, defect, or obstacle, which can and virtually demands to be modified by rhetorical discourse. See Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, I (January, 1968), pp. 1-14.

within less than a month. It was deemed necessary in order to win from the American public the patience, the time, the support for "a program which can lead to a peace we can live with and a peace we can be proud of" for which Nixon pleaded at the end of his May pronouncement.⁵¹

A brief look at the timing of the Nixon statements may help to clarify this. The press conferences play a unique role here. Although Nixon promised frequent meetings with the press, they became less frequent as time went on, dwindling noticeably in the fall of 1969, when public anti-war demonstrations increased. In other words, he held more press conferences while public support was behind him, during the "honeymoon" of his Presidency, while hopes for negotiation were still high and when he was less vulnerable to attack from the press. Nixon held fourteen news conferences during 1969-1970, and half of them were during the first nine months in office. This is compared to fifty-one by Lyndon Johnson during his first two years, forty-six by John Kennedy, and fifty-six by Dwight Eisenhower.⁵² Although Vietnam was frequently discussed in press conferences, no new revelations were made there, and according to the procedure used by Nixon in preparing for these meetings, as many as ninety percent of the questions asked were anticipated by Nixon's staff.⁵³ Thus, even though the topics

⁵¹John Osborne, "The President's Fading Hope," New Republic, 161 (September 27, 1969), p. 17

⁵²"Nixon and the Press," U.S. News and World Report, 69 (December 28, 1970), p. 14.

⁵³"How the President Gets Ready for a News Conference," U.S. News and World Report, 67 (December 22, 1969), p. 47.

at a press conference are introduced by the reporters, the timing of the conferences is scheduled by the President and he is usually aware of what will be asked. So, in a sense, he has control as to what will be discussed even in these public statements. Nixon used the conferences to clarify and to ask for support for his Vietnam plan; what he said was always consistent with the policy at the time of the conference.

It must always be remembered that, when elected, Nixon was "a minority President, who faces an opposition majority on Capitol Hill, a centrist Republican who confronts a political left and right, both flaming with angry frustration."⁵⁴ He inherited a country torn with dissent, a "weary public, both hopeful and skeptical after the last four years."⁵⁵ He chose then to begin his Presidency with an era of conciliation. He offered no easy solutions to difficult problems. He attempted, as described by Theodore Sorensen, to "exude an attitude of steady, low-key calm, compromise, and continuity. He has made very few new proposals, has postponed most controversial decisions, and has sought to create an atmosphere of quiet prudence instead of bold action."⁵⁶ Appar-

⁵⁴"Nixon's Message: 'Let Us Gather the Light,'" Time, 93, (January 24, 1969), p. 9.

⁵⁵Theodore C. Sorensen, "The First Hundred Days of Richard M. Nixon," Saturday Review, 52 (May 17, 1969), p. 17.

⁵⁶Ibid.

ently, as Sorensen goes on to say, the attitude was a wise one:

The Gallup Poll indicated that both President and Congress read the public correctly. Mr. Nixon's standing rose steadily among voters of both parties in all sections of the country. Conservatives, disappointed in his moderate approach, still hoped he would prove to be one of theirs. Liberals, expecting immediate disaster, confessed with pleasure that it had not happened. The working press longed for more exciting headlines, but gave generally high marks to his new image of quiet circumspection.⁵⁷

Every President is allowed a "honeymoon" period, when criticism is quieted to allow the new Administration to stabilize itself. Nixon took full advantage of this. He waited until May 14, before making his first major pronouncement on Vietnam. Time magazine speculates that Nixon took the occasion of a Communist proposal in Paris which seemed to contain several points of concession, to present this first major statement. The Vietcong package had little effect on the content of Nixon's presentation, according to Time's analysis, but it decided him on form and timing: "He was going to hold the speech in his pocket for a propitious moment," said an assistant. "When the V.C. came along, that was the propitious moment."⁵⁸ Even so, this address, as had the press conferences prior to it, agreed only to negotiation and mutual withdrawal. Nevertheless, as was stated earlier, Nixon introduced his Vietnamization program at Midway less than a month later. It

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁸"Nixon's Contract for Peace," Time, 93 (May 23, 1969), pp. 20-21.

seems unlikely that such a step was not anticipated before May 14.

Newsweek agreed that Nixon had decided as early as February to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam during 1969.⁵⁹ However, the purpose and timing of the Midway announcement was complex. The lack of progress in the negotiations (for which Nixon had held high hopes during the first months of his term of office) was apparent; even though the disclosure of the first U.S. troop withdrawals and the subsequent strengthening of South Vietnamese troops was the embarkation of Vietnamization, it was also another bid to bring Hanoi to negotiate a political settlement. Thus the number of troops withdrawn at that time had several political implications. For Hanoi, the number had to be large enough to indicate a true strengthening of South Vietnam and a concession from the United States indicating a desire for negotiation, yet small enough not to seem like a U.S. defeat. For the American public, the number had to be large enough to placate the critics, but again, small enough so as not to appear a cave-in to the enemy. The number arrived at was 25,000.

This figure, considered "token" by anti-war critics, did raise some protest. Still, public attitude remained relatively subdued during the summer of 1969. However, with the return of college students to the campuses in September, Newsweek suggested that Nixon decided to make a second withdrawal

⁵⁹"Vietnam: The Long, Long Way Home," Newsweek, 73 (June 23, 1969), p. 25.

announcement to try to ward off any massive protests from that group.⁶⁰ (That announcement, made September 16, had been delayed from August, sources agree, because of escalated fighting by the North Vietnamese, in an attempt to show the enemy that U.S. policy was not irreversible.) The second announcement of a withdrawal of 35,000 did not calm dissent, however. The first war moratorium was planned by anti-war protesters for October 15. The honeymoon had obviously ended. Critics who had "watched and waited" decided that Nixon was not going to deliver, that despite the withdrawals the war would not end quickly. Pressure increased from Senate doves for more positive action. Polls showed Nixon's popularity to be 13% lower at the end of eight months in office than his three predecessors.⁶¹ In short, time had run out and the critics were demanding action.

Nixon did not give it to them. His policy remained static. He openly stated in his press conference of September 26, that he expected criticism but he would not be affected by it.⁶² In fact, Nixon did nothing to placate his critics. Instead, he changed his strategy of conciliation to one designed to rally support from his silent majority in order if not to still, at least to counteract the loud voices

⁶⁰"On the Horns of a Dilemma," Newsweek, 74 (September 29, 1969), p. 32.

⁶¹"TRB," New Republic, 161 (October 11, 1969), p. 6.

⁶²Public Papers, p. 749.

of dissent. He announced on October 13, a major address on Vietnam to be given November 3. Robert Newman argues the timing of the announcement was designed to neutralize the effects of the October 13 Moratorium, while the address itself was timed to neutralize the November 15 Moratorium.⁶³ Nixon also made an unprecedented visit to Congress on November 13 (two days before the Moratorium, with protesters already gathering in Washington) in which he addressed both houses, thanking them for their support on his Vietnam stand, making a plea for unity.

Polarization of Attitudes. Perhaps the most effective strategy for winning support from middle America was the polarization of attitudes which took place during the fall of 1969. It is impossible to assess whether the tactic used was deliberate (TRB in the New Republic argues that it was),⁶⁴ but polarization did occur at a time when public support for Nixon was diminishing, and whether or not Nixon planned it, he did nothing to stop it; indeed, he used it to his advantage.

The primary impetus for this polarization was a series of speeches given by Vice President Spiro Agnew, which consisted of polemic against the liberal element in American society and against the media. In doing so, he called up

⁶³Robert P. Newman, "Under the Veneer: Nixon's Vietnam Speech of November 3, 1969," Quarterly Journal of Speech, LVI (April, 1970), p. 168.

⁶⁴"TRB," New Republic, 161 (November 29, 1969), p. 6.

surprising agreement from a large segment of middle America.

Kenneth Crawford describes it this way:

In appealing for the support of a "silent majority" and repudiating "effete snobs" of the Northeastern intellectual-academic-journalistic complex, he [Agnew] pressed an emotional release button of surprising potential

It develops that millions of middle-class people, blue-collar to upper suburban, feel that they have been patronized too long by a self-celebrated cultural elite. They may have got this notion from journalists who keep calling them know-nothings and deploring their crudities. They are quite willing to classify themselves as members of this put upon and despised majority and they aren't as silent as they used to be.⁶⁵

Nixon publicly stated that Agnew's views were Agnew's own, that he was not speaking for the White House, but on the other hand, he commended Agnew for doing a "great job."⁶⁶

The content of Nixon's November 3 speech was aimed directly at the silent majority. Critics complained that Nixon did nothing to appease the anti-war sentiment. Lynn Hinds and Carolyn Smith,⁶⁷ in an analysis of Nixon's rhetorical strategies, accuse him of always speaking in "opposites." They cite Meg Greenfield, writing for the Reporter,⁶⁸ who said, "Ideas never quite exist for him [Nixon] until they have been pitted against something else--an extreme danger, a

⁶⁵Kenneth Crawford, "The First Nixon Year," Newsweek, 75 (January 26, 1970), p. 26.

⁶⁶"Nixon Shifts Gears--From 'Soft Sell' to 'Action Now,'" U.S. News and World Report, 67 (November 10, 1969), p. 18.

⁶⁷Lynn Hinds is Assistant Professor of Speech at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; Carolyn Smith is Associate Director of Forensics, University of Pittsburgh.

⁶⁸Cited in Lynn Hinds and Carolyn Smith, "Rhetoric of Opposites," Nation, 210 (February 16, 1970), p. 172.

radically different point of view, or a potential attack from some sinister quarter." Hinds and Smith go on to say, Nixon "perceives in opposites, he thinks in opposites, and therefore he speaks in opposites."⁶⁹ In the November 3 address, they argue, Nixon did nothing to reconcile the various positions and attitudes existing toward Vietnam. Although there were degrees of opposition toward the war, Nixon pitted "all dissenters," whom he said advocated "Lose in Vietnam--bring the boys home," opposite his own position--Vietnamization--which was right and reasonable. They conclude:

Nixon's rhetoric has important implications both for himself and for the political climate of the country. The effect on Nixon is to limit his options. What he needed to do in the speech on the war was to prevent further polarization on the war. He needed to move the American people closer to a middle ground in order to gain time to work out his plan for ending the war. Instead, the speech caused further polarization, the opposite of what Nixon needed. His rhetorical habit left him no alternative.⁷⁰

What Nixon "needed" is a matter of opinion. Whether his rhetoric was wise is a subject for debate. Nevertheless, Nixon did follow the course of polarizing his audience. After a period of conciliatory action, Nixon apparently decided he had no hope of winning the dissenters with his plan. He instead made a serious play for the support of the silent majority. And if Kevin Phillips' theory is to be accepted,

⁶⁹Hinds and Smith, p. 172.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 174.

the plan was politically expedient. There was considerable response from middle America. Nixon proudly displayed a large pile of telegrams approving his stand the day following the speech; polls reflected majority acceptance of the Vietnam policy; a majority of Representatives in the House signed a petition supporting the President; Veteran's Day became a demonstration of support; "Love America" rallies and American flags flourished as symbols backing the President.

Whether the reaction of Americans was "for" Nixon or "against" the dissenters matters little. Polarization is an extreme example of the balance theory. Nixon, and more dramatically Agnew, alligned the Administration, Vietnami- zation, patriotism and good, against dissent, protest and defeat; to stand for one meant being against the other and vice versa. With this method Nixon lost one group to win another--and the one he wanted to win was the majority. This gave him the time needed to let Vietnamization progress to the point the public would be convinced it would work.

Nixon undoubtedly used many strategies in his Vietnam rhetoric in 1969-1970. But given his purpose--to win support--and his audience--the "silent majority"--he de- pended primarily on using existing values of his audience, timing of the statements, and, related to this, polarization. After the fall of 1969, the dissenters' voices quieted and so did the Administration's. Only once, with the Cambodian

action in May and June of 1970, did Nixon feel compelled to heighten his rhetoric in order to persuade the American public his decision to send ground troops into Cambodia, a decision many perceived as an escalation of the war, was sound, was necessary, and was consistent with his entire Vietnamization plan. By the fall of 1970, what little Nixon did say about Vietnam was repetition of what he'd said before. The proposal of a standstill cease-fire in October, 1970, made the Vietnamization plan complete. Although the war was far from over, for the Nixon Administration and seemingly for the American public, the United States was on its way out of Vietnam. Thus, the war, at least for the time being, was no longer a major issue.

Throughout this particular rhetorical campaign, Richard Nixon had to rely to a large extent on the media to carry his message to the public. The remainder of this study then will examine the coverage given to the President's statements by two of the most important newspapers in the United States, The New York Times and The Washington Post. This may reveal what message the public received.

CHAPTER III

AMOUNT OF COVERAGE

One of the problems of a newspaper's "gatekeepers" is to determine each day which news items will be included in the paper and how much space will be devoted to those items. It would seem reasonable to assume that the more coverage given a story, the more important the newspaper considers that story to be.

Another editorial decision must be made about where to place an item in the newspaper. A page one story will have more impact on opinion than one placed on page 29.¹

We should be able, therefore to partially determine The New York Times' and The Washington Post's attitude toward Richard Nixon's major statements on Vietnam during 1969 and 1970 by examining the amount and kind of coverage given to these statements.

A large number of column inches was devoted to this coverage by both The Times and The Post. In each of the twelve instances, a front page story was placed in the right hand columns, considered to be the most prominent position in the paper, reporting the event and its content. And in

¹Lester Markel quoted in Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 17.

all but one instance the complete text of the statement was printed on the inside pages of the newspaper (the exception being a TV conversation during July, 1970, which was excerpted).

In addition to this direct coverage, the newspapers offered a large amount of supplementary information. The Times, for example, printed fifty-seven and The Post eighty-seven editorial articles. And The Times included 122 related news articles as compared to The Post's 101.

Related News Articles

Some of these related articles were stories announcing the speech or statement, predictions about what was to be covered, or interpretations of the event as related to various situations (the effect of the statement on South Vietnam, for example). To illustrate, following the Midway announcement of the first troop pullouts in June, 1969, The Times included an article about the effect of the announcement in Saigon, one about how Nixon's staff handled the parley (contrasting Nixon's style with President Johnson's), one about a military briefing given Nixon, and one concerning statements by Secretary of State Melvin Laird about hopes for future pull-outs.

Journalist Curtis MacDougall states that the purpose of related stories, called sidebars, is to "round out the complete account" of an important story. He says it "deals with

phases of a story as a whole which conceivably could be included in the main account but not without either lengthening it too much or sacrificing some details."²

The number of sidebars attached to the coverage of each speech was not equal. If we can assume the more sidebars, the more important the story, then for both papers, the April 30, 1970, Cambodian address was the most important statement made by Nixon about the war. However, The Times included thirty-one related articles as compared to The Post's nineteen. Other important stories for The Times, in descending order, were the November 3 address (twenty-three articles) and the October 7, 1970, peace proposal (twenty articles). Far down from these big three came the Midway announcement of the first troop pullouts and the May 14 address, Nixon's first major statement on Vietnam, with ten stories each. All the others received fewer than these, all the way down to one related article concerning the December 15, 1969, withdrawal announcement.

The Post, on the other hand, was more consistent. Below the nineteen for Cambodia, there were fifteen related articles with the May 14 address and the October 7 address, and thirteen for the November 3 address and the Midway announcement. All the others carried six or less.

The Times, then, appeared to give more coverage to the three stories it happened to relate to most strongly editori-

²Ibid., p. 189.

ally (November 3 and Cambodia, negatively; October 7, favorably). The Post gave about equal coverage to the five the Administration probably would have considered to be the most significant speeches of the series. Although the total amount of coverage given by the two newspapers over the twelve statements is similar, the distribution is different.

Printed Reactions to the Statements. Nearly half these related articles in both newspapers dealt explicitly with the reactions of various groups and individuals to the Nixon statements. In covering the event, for example, both The Times and The Post consistently printed the reactions of the Communists (the Vietcong, Hanoi, Russia, etc.), which not unexpectedly were always negative in nature. These reactions appeared frequently on page one, though no particular pattern seemed to emerge. It is the printed reactions of the "non-enemy," i.e., Americans and friendly countries, that provide an insight into the newspapers' coverage.

Following the two statements to which it gave the strongest negative editorial reaction--the November 3 address and the Cambodian action--The New York Times seemed to emphasize the negative, highly critical reactions of Americans. After the November 3 address, for example, The Times printed five negative reactions, two of which appeared on the front page. These two are particularly significant. They shared a joint headline:

CONGRESS DOVES UNHAPPY; PROTEST LEADERS SPURRED

The sub-headline of one article read: "Nixon Speech is Scored." That article, as one might expect, dealt with the negative reactions of the anti-war protest leaders.³ The sub-headline of the second article was: "Supporters Applaud Policy." The implication here (except for the main headline) is that this article will be favorable to the President. But the lead paragraph, which many readers never go beyond,⁴ states, "President Nixon's speech on Vietnam was greeted tonight with disappointment by Congressional doves, portending a growing division over Administration policy in Southeast Asia."⁵ Indeed, except for two minor passages in support of the speech, the article is unquestionably negative in reaction.

"Favorable" response to the speech included two from the U.S. military in South Vietnam. The first appeared on page one prior to the speech. Although the officials professed no knowledge of the speech content, the article said, many believed the speech and reaction to it would be a "turning point in the U.S. attitude toward the war."⁶ The second article appearing on the inside pages following the speech,

³John W. Finney and David E. Rosenbaum, "Congress Doves Unhappy; Protest Leaders Spurred," New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 1.

⁴MacDougall, p. 17

⁵Finney, p. 1.

⁶Terence Smith, "US Command Is Hopeful on Eve of Nixon's Speech," New York Times, November 3, 1969, p. 1.

reported praise from officials but disappointment from some American soldiers.⁷ Most of the others, at best, were mixed. An article first reporting a resolution in the House of Representatives supporting the President, appeared on page ten under the headline: "Nixon Talk Angers Senate Critics."⁸ A later article about another resolution was printed on page one, headlined: "House Unit Backs Nixon on Vietnam."⁹ However, the tone of this article suggests that the action was at the instigation of the Administration. The lead paragraph states: "With White House encouragement, the House Foreign Affairs Committee approved today a resolution endorsing President Nixon's 'efforts to negotiate a just peace in Vietnam.'"¹⁰ (Emphasis mine.)

Similarly, an article¹¹ which at first glance appears to be highly favorable to Nixon casts doubt on the reliability of the encouraging response. The headlines read:

NIXON DECLARES 'SILENT MAJORITY' BACKS HIS SPEECH
Shows Stacks of Telegrams of Support and a Small Pile of
Hostile Ones

⁷Terence Smith, "Officials in Saigon Appear Pleased," New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 17.

⁸John W. Finney, "Nixon Talk Angers Senate Critics," New York Times, November 5, 1969, p. 10.

⁹John W. Finney, "House Unit Backs Nixon on Vietnam," New York Times, November 7, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹"Nixon Declares 'Silent Majority' Backs His Speech," New York Times, November 5, 1969, p. 1.

After describing Nixon's happy reaction to telegrams and phone calls of support, the article closed with a statement that it was not clear how many of these responses were converts and how many had been supporters before the speech. It further reported that a newsletter had gone out to 13,000 Republicans asking them to watch the speech and to show their support.

Thus, The Times seemed inclined to refute reports of favorable reactions without any similar kind of rebuttal of unfavorable comment. The one simply stated favorable response to the November 3 address, a Gallup Poll showing 77% of the public backing Nixon, was printed on page eleven.¹²

No such pattern emerged with The Washington Post. The articles tended to contain only what the headline indicated and a fair balance in the headline appeared if reactions were mixed. For example, following the November 3 address, a headline read:¹³

LEGISLATORS PRAISE NIXON ADDRESS: SOME SEE 'LITTLE NEW'
IN SPEECH

An article showing reaction to the April 20, 1970, address was headlined:¹⁴

GI PULLOUT PRAISED ON HILL; GENERALS COOL

¹²"Gallup Reports 77% Back Nixon," New York Times, November 5, 1969, p. 11.

¹³"Legislators Praise Nixon; Some See 'Little New' in Speech," Washington Post, November 4, 1969, p. A10.

¹⁴"GI Pullout Praised on Hill; Generals Cool," Washington Post, April 22, 1970, p. A11.

And, finally, an article reporting mixed response from Congress concerning the rather unpopular Cambodian action was headlined simply:¹⁵

CONGRESS REACTS

On one occasion, The Post printed opposite points of view in two articles which appeared next to each other on page one. One read:¹⁶

NIXON SAYS SPEECH HAS WIDE SUPPORT

The other:¹⁷

SPEECH SEEN FUELING PROTEST

The second article, by the way, appeared in full on page A7 of the newspaper. The headline on the front page preceeded only a one-sentence summary of the article. The effect of this technique at least seems to be an attempt at balance, even though space perhaps did not permit the running of both articles on page one.

We might note here, too, that the first article mentioned (headlined "Nixon Says Speech Has Wide Support") made the only reference by The Post to the House resolution supporting the President (treated earlier in The Times analysis).¹⁸ The Post called it "a drafted-in-advance resolution

¹⁵"Congress Reacts," Washington Post, May 2, 1970, p. A1.

¹⁶Chalmers M. Roberts, "Nixon Says Speech Has Wide Support," Washington Post, November 5, 1969, p. A1.

¹⁷"Speech Seen Fueling Protest," Washington Post, November 5, 1969, p. A1.

¹⁸See page 52.

backing the President."¹⁹ And this article listed names of Congressmen who opposed the speech as well as those who favored it, although the bulk of the article dealt with support.

On two occasions, The Post printed headlines which did not indicate directly what the article contained. Both followed the Midway announcement in June, 1969. The first read:²⁰

MCGOVERN SEES 'TOKENISM'

Besides the response of Senator George McGovern, the article also presented the reactions of eight other Congressmen, five of which were favorable. The next day, The Post printed an article headlined:²¹

TASS CALLS WITHDRAWAL OF 25,000 'DROP IN SEA'

Again, this contained opinions of other countries besides Russia, including some allies who supported the announcement.

In sum, The Washington Post articles containing reactions to Presidential statements were less complex than those of The New York Times. Fewer attempts were made to explain the reactions; hence, a straighter job of reporting was done and the headline could more accurately indicate the contents of the article.

¹⁹Roberts, "Wide Support," p. A6.

²⁰"McGovern Sees 'Tokenism'," Washington Post, June 9, 1969, p. A18.

²¹"Tass Calls Withdrawal of 25,000 'Drop in Sea'," Washington Post, June 10, 1969, p. A15.

One other aspect concerning reactions to the statements should be noted before moving on. Both The Times and The Post make a practice of quoting United States Congressmen following an event of national importance. Related to the Nixon statements on Vietnam, the practice seems to differ between the two newspapers. The Post quoted a total of sixty different Congressmen over the two year period while The Times quoted only twenty-nine (half as many). In The Times, certain Senators appeared consistently, most of them leading doves who opposed the President's Vietnam policy. George McGovern, Edward Kennedy, William Fulbright, Mike Mansfield, Albert Gore, Frank Church and Mark Hatfield, for example, all of whom were mentioned at least three times, were quoted a total of thirty-seven times (more than half of all references to Congressmen). This was compared to only three leading supporters of Mr. Nixon's policy who were quoted at least three times: John Stennis, Gerald Ford, and John Tower. The total references to these three were nine.

The Post, on the other hand, quoted a total of eleven Congressmen three times or more; six who were opponents of the President's policy (William Fulbright, Jacob Javits, Mike Mansfield, Frank Church, Edward Muskie, John Sherman Cooper) were mentioned a total of twenty-six times: five who were supporters of the President (John Stennis, Edward Brooke, Gerald Ford, Robert Griffin, Hugh Scott) were mentioned a total of nineteen times. These are from a total of 102

references made to Congressmen reacting to the President's statements.

Editorial Comment

The final area to be examined concerning amount of coverage given by The Times and The Post is that of editorial comment. These are articles published on the editorial page in the form of editorials (unsigned) or editorial columns (signed), or articles labeled "news analysis" which appear anywhere in the newspaper.

The New York Times and The Washington Post were comparable in the number of news analyses and editorials reacting to the twelve Nixon statements concerning Vietnam. The Times published thirteen news analyses and twenty-two editorials, while The Post published fifteen news analyses and twenty editorials.

There was considerable difference in the number of editorial columns: The Times published twenty-two while The Post published fifty-two, well over twice as many. It was this difference in number that may also have provided a difference in type of editorial response. Each of these articles was evaluated according to content as being definitely in support of the statement or policy (favorable), definitely opposed to the statement (unfavorable), or mixed, i.e., an analysis of both pros and cons. Of the twenty-two Times columns, ten were considered to be mixed, ten unfavorable, and only two favorable. The Post was also weighted

toward negative comments with twenty-two of the fifty-two articles being unfavorable. These negative columns for both newspapers represent about half of the total columns. However, The Post also included fourteen which were favorable, as well as thirteen which were mixed.

But, perhaps even more significant, there was a great difference in the number of columnists represented. The Times published the columns of only five writers, James Reston, Tom Wicker, Anthony Lewis, Russell Baker, and C. L. Sulzberger. All must be considered as politically liberal except Sulzberger, and he had only one column published. Eleven of the twenty-two were written by James Reston.

The Post, on the other hand, published thirteen²² different columnists (four of which were co-authored, e.g., Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden). Joseph Kraft, definitely a liberal writer who frequently opposed the President's Vietnam policy, led in number with eleven of the fifty-one columns. However, Joseph Alsop, who is conservative, had nine, and William S. White, also conservative, had three. In short, The Post, in editorial columns offered a balance of opinion that never appeared in The Times. In fact, occasionally in The Post, a Nixon statement was opposed not only by liberals because he had not gone far enough,

²²Joseph Alsop; Josiah Lee Auspitz; Marquis Childs; Roscoe and Geoffrey Drummond; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak; Richard Harwood and Lawrence Stern; Stanley Karnow, Joseph Kraft; Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden; Don Oberdorfer; Chalmers M. Roberts; Stephen S. Rosenfeld; William S. White.

in their opinion, to end the war, but by conservatives because he had not gone far enough to win it.²³ A conservative point of view was never represented, pro or con, in an editorial column relating to a Nixon statement in The New York Times.

The editorials themselves may also provide some insight. Although the number of editorials in the two newspapers was approximately the same, there was some difference in support for the President. The Post published twelve (of twenty) mixed editorials to six (of twenty-two) in The Times. (Remember that a "mixed" column represented pros and cons.) The Times wrote ten negative editorials, seven of them related to the Cambodian action and two following the November 3 address. The Post published seven negative editorials, six of them related to the Cambodian action. (Interestingly, The Post did not print a negative editorial to the November 3 address.) The Times published six favorable editorials, four of them in response to the October 7 peace proposal and one to the appointment of David Bruce as ambassador to the Paris Peace Talks. The Post had only one favorable editorial, following the June 19, 1969, news conference.

The approach of the news analyses seemed to be similar in the two newspapers. The Times printed one favorable, two unfavorable, and ten mixed columns. The Post published none

²³See for example William S. White, "'Domino Theory' Being Proved Every Day in Southeast Asia," Washington Post, April 25, 1970, p. A15.

favorable, three unfavorable, and twelve mixed. It would appear that a news analysis should present just that, with little evaluation. Both papers seemed, for the most part, to have done that.

We may conclude then, that the coverage in news articles and editorials relating to Richard Nixon's statements on Vietnam differed somewhat between The New York Times and The Washington Post. Further discussion about the content of these articles, and ultimately, the significance of this difference, will be covered in the following chapters.

CHAPTER IV

EMPHASIS AND CONTEXT

Objective reporting requires, among other things, that events be placed in their proper perspective within the context of the entire situation. MacDougall, for example, in discussing the responsibility of the reporter, suggests it is his job to realize that any news event is only a link in a chain of events and should be placed within the context.¹ If a reporter chooses to emphasize an idea, that idea should be significant within the larger context.

Headline Emphasis

Journalism, of course, has many ways of emphasizing ideas, two of the most important being the headline and the lead paragraph of a story, each of which is inextricably linked to the other.

Traditionally, news writing uses an inverted pyramid style: the most important fact is placed at the beginning, the second most important second, etc.² The headline, according to Mitchell Charnley, in his book Reporting, is

¹Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 50.

"a device for describing briefly, in readily legible type, the most salient points of a story;" it is "the newspaper's index;" it "enables the reader to decide at a glance whether the story is for him."³ Although not written by the reporter, the headline is taken directly from the story. "If the story is well written," says MacDougall, "the headline writer should not have to look beyond the first paragraph or two to find the words."⁴ If we assume a reader notices only the headline of a story, then he will see the most significant ideas in the story.

There must be some difficulty in deciding what is the most important idea to come out of a speech or statement of some length and complexity, which idea should be emphasized. If we examine the headlines for the articles reporting the twelve Nixon statements, we should be able to determine what The New York Times and The Washington Post considered to be the most important idea or ideas in the statements. This may add another dimension to our understanding of these newspapers' treatment of Nixon and Vietnam. The Times, on a lead story, usually had a series of headlines, in descending order of importance. The Post only occasionally carried anything other than one headline.

Withdrawal. There seemed to be two prevailing themes that appeared across the headlines of the articles reporting

³Mitchell V. Charnley, Reporting (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1959), p. 114.

⁴MacDougall, p. 51.

the President's statements. The first and the most prominent was "withdrawal." Vietnamization unquestionably involved troop withdrawal and several of the statements were for the express purpose of announcing troop cutbacks: the Midway announcement, the December 16, 1969, and April 20, 1970, speeches. These naturally could carry a headline announcing the withdrawal figures. They did in both newspapers.

However, Vietnamization was more than withdrawal. Especially during these two years Mr. Nixon stressed again and again in his statements the necessity of self-determination for South Vietnam and the hope for a negotiated settlement. However, the newspapers' headlines seldom reflected that concern. Instead, in nearly every speech, the emphasis of the headline remained troop reduction.

The Times made one attempt to include Nixon's concern for a proper political settlement. It was following the May 14, 1969, address. The headlines, in the order in which they appeared were:⁵

NIXON ASKS TROOP PULLOUT IN A YEAR AND WOULD JOIN VIETNAM
POLITICAL TALKS
SPEAKS TO NATION
Hints Partial Cutback of U.S. Forces Will Come in Any Case

Although the May 14 address did include the possibility of American troop withdrawal, the crux of the speech was an ex-

⁵Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Asks Troop Pullout In a Year and Would Join Vietnam Political Talks," New York Times, May 15, 1969, p. 1.

planation of Nixon's priorities in Vietnam: an honorable and lasting peace; the importance of negotiation; the right of self-determination for South Vietnam. In his proposal, the President quite explicitly rejected an American unilateral withdrawal but did urge a negotiated mutual withdrawal and a political settlement. Yet the headlines emphasized troop pullouts. The Post headline read simply:⁶

NIXON ASKS MUTUAL VIET PULLOUT

The Washington Post emphasized troop pullouts on two other occasions when perhaps that subject was not the central idea of the speech. The November 3 address, Nixon's first full explanation of Vietnamization was headlined:⁷

NIXON BARS 'PRECIPITATE' PULLOUT

A sub-headline for this article read:

Asks US Support of His Peace Plan

Neither of these headlines gives much indication of what that peace plan was.

And The Post announced the Cambodian interim report on June 4, 1970, with the headline:⁸

NIXON RESUMES TROOP PULLOUT

Only the sub-headline gave any indication about the President's feelings about the operation:

⁶Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Asks Mutual Viet Pullout," Washington Post, May 15, 1969, p. A1.

⁷Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Bars 'Precipitate' Pullout," Washington Post, November 4, 1969, p. A1.

⁸Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Resumes Troop Pullout," Washington Post, June 4, 1970, p. A1.

Cambodian Drive 'Most Successful'

All totaled, seven of the twelve statements carried a headline in The Post which had something to do with troop withdrawals.

The headlines concerning the June 19, 1969, news conference are particularly interesting, for they too deal with troop reductions. It should be noted that a news conference consists of a number of unrelated items, with the order determined by the questions and not by the President. Therefore, what the newspaper chooses to headline truly reflects what it considers to be the most important. A question was asked at the June 19 news conference in regard to a suggestion by Clark Clifford, former Defense Secretary under Lyndon Johnson, that 100,000 American troops ought to be out of Vietnam by the end of 1969, and all ground troops out by the end of 1970.⁹ Nixon answered the question with a rather long criticism of the Secretary, stating that Clifford had only escalated the war while in office and had failed to act on such a suggestion when he had the opportunity. The President went on to say that withdrawals would continue: "I will not indicate the number, because the number will depend upon the extent of the training of the South Vietnamese, as well as developments in Paris, and the other factors that I have mentioned previously."¹⁰

⁹U.S., President, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1971), Richard Nixon, 1969, p. 471. ♣

¹⁰Ibid., p. 472.

He then said, as far as how many will be withdrawn by the end of 1969 or 1970, "I would hope that we could beat Mr. Clifford's timetable, just as I think we have done a little better than he did when he was in charge of our national defense."¹¹ The Administration later explained further that this statement was a hope--the fastest possible end to the war was a hope--but that it was in no way intended to be a pledge; he had specifically said the rate was uncertain. But The Times headlines seemed otherwise:¹²

PRESIDENT HOPES PULLOUT WILL TOP 200,000 BEFORE '71
Cut Conditional on Progress at Talks and in Training of
South Vietnamese
REBUTTAL TO CLIFFORD
Nixon, at News Conference, Says He Hopes to 'Beat'
Timetable by Critic

The Post printed a similar headline:¹³

NIXON IS HOPEFUL OF 1970 PULLOUT FOR COMBAT GIs
Plans to Top Clifford's Timetable

The Post's sub-headline is so positive, it leaves little room for doubt that this was a promise by the President. The emphasis in both papers is definitely on withdrawals although a number of other items were covered in the news conference and although the Administration was to disagree about the interpretation of the remarks about Clifford.

Public Support. A second theme which appeared in the headlines reporting the President's statements was what the

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Max Frankel, "President Hopes Pullout Will Top 200,000 Before '71," New York Times, June 20, 1969, p. 1.

¹³Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Is Hopeful of 1970 Pullout for Combat GIs," Washington Post, June 20, 1969, p. A1.

newspapers, particularly The Times, saw as an appeal by Nixon for public support.

In the fall of 1969, the period of the most active anti-war protests, The Times seemed to become more critical of Nixon's Vietnam policy. The newspaper often questioned Nixon's motives as being less than praiseworthy (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V). One of Nixon's motives which The Times found to be wanting was what it called his bid for time, for public patience. In other words, from the newspaper's perspective, he seemed to be more interested in quieting his critics and winning popular support than he was in trying to end the war. The Times pointed this up in a headline reporting a news conference of September 26, 1969. Seven of the twenty-one questions asked concerned Nixon's feelings about the progress in Vietnam and about the death of Ho Chi Minh. Yet The Times chose to headline a relatively minor statement. Nixon said:

I think we are on the right course in Vietnam. We are on a course that is going to end the war. It will end much sooner if we can have to an extent, to the extent possible in this free country, a united front behind very reasonable proposals. If we have that united front, the enemy then will begin to talk. . . . The moment they start discussing our proposals, then that means we can bring the war to a conclusion sooner than if we just continue on our present course.¹⁴

The Times headlined this news conference:¹⁵

NIXON ASKS PUBLIC TO GIVE HIM TIME FOR ENDING WAR

¹⁴Public Papers, pp. 757-758.

¹⁵Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Asks Public to Give Him Time for Ending War," New York Times, September 27, 1969, p. 1.

Other Side Will Negotiate Only If U.S. Backs His
Proposals, He Insists
SCORES GOODELL PLAN
President Asserts Campus Protests Will Have No Effect
on His Policy

And for the headline for the November 3 address, again Nixon's first full explanation for his plan for Vietnamization, The Times printed:¹⁶

NIXON CALLS FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT AS HE PURSUES HIS VIETNAM
PLAN ON A SECRET PULLOUT TIMETABLE
POLICY UNCHANGED
President Says Hasty Withdrawal Would Be a 'Disaster'

(The lead paragraph of the article goes on to say the President "pleaded tonight for domestic support as he persisted in his effort to find peace in Vietnam. . . .")¹⁷ This headline suggests a "disappointment" that the President was continuing in what The Times considered to be an unsatisfactory program. Nixon certainly did make a strong appeal in this speech for support for Vietnamization, but it is questionable whether it was the central idea of the address. The Times chose to emphasize that appeal. The headline in no way stressed the important points of the Vietnamization plan.

The Washington Post shared this interest in Nixon's appeals for public support in these two statements. It,

¹⁶Max Frankel, "Nixon Calls for Public Support As He Pursues His Vietnam Plan on a Secret Pullout Timetable," New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid.

like The Times, headlined the news conference of September 26, 1969, with the President's plea:¹⁸

NIXON ASKS US UNITY FOR PEACE

And, it will be remembered, the sub-headline for the November 3 address in The Post read:¹⁹

Asks US Support of His Peace Plan

Even in an article preceeding the November 3 address, a Post headline read:²⁰

UNITY PLEA IS SEEN IN VIET TALK

The article dealt with what might be covered in this major speech. The headline indicates the newspaper was expecting such an appeal for support, which perhaps could account for the emphasis given the appeal in reporting the speech. In other words, one tends to perceive what one expects to perceive. The Post (and perhaps The Times) may have been preparing itself and the American public to receive such a message by giving this emphasis to it.

Other Headlines. A final headline from the articles reporting the statements themselves should be noted. The Times, in this particular instance, juxtaposed two articles under the same headline. The lead article was the reporting of the President's final statement about the Cambodia action.

¹⁸Chalmers M. Roberts, "Nixon Asks U.S. Unity for Peace," Washington Post, September 27, 1969, p. A1.

¹⁹Kilpatrick, "'Precipitate' Pullout," p. A1.

²⁰Murrey Marder, "Unity Plea Is Seen in Viet Talk," Washington Post, November 2, 1969, p. A1.

The first part of the headline, that related to this particular article, could be said to be favorable to Nixon:²¹

PRESIDENT HAILS CAMBODIA DRIVE, CALLS ON HANOI FOR
SERIOUS TALK;

However, the final part of the headline, relating to a side story, read:

SENATE PASSES WAR POWERS CURB

A similar joint headline reported the same two events in The Post:²²

NIXON PRODS HANOI; WAR CURB IS VOTED

The effect here is that although Nixon considered the Cambodian operation to be successful (a fact The Post did not indicate in the headline, or even the sub-headline: "Limit Set on Help for Cambodia"), the newspapers, by linking the two events together in a headline, made sure the public realized the Senate was attempting to prevent a similar action from ever reoccurring.

Neither newspaper was favorable to the Cambodian action. In fact, the only headline The Times chose to make full-page, eight columns, relating to Nixon and the war during this period was on May 1, 1970:

NIXON SENDS COMBAT FORCES TO CAMBODIA TO DRIVE COMMUNISTS
FROM STAGING ZONE

²¹Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President Hails Cambodia Drive, Calls on Hanoi for Serious Talk; Senate Passes War Powers Curb," New York Times, July 1, 1970, p. 1.

²²"Nixon Prods Hanoi; War Curb Is Voted," Washington Post, July 1, 1970, p. A1.

Not even announcements of troop withdrawals received such emphasis.

This was not true in The Post. Although this newspaper does not frequently use the full-page headline, it did so for nine of the twelve reports of the Nixon statements. These certainly included each of the major policy statements and all the troop withdrawal announcements. This would seem to indicate an equal importance placed by The Post on all the President's statements.

Content Emphasis

Emphasis, of course, can also come simply in the content of the story. If an idea should be emphasized only if it is significant within the larger context, then a newspaper should never choose to highlight a relatively minor idea, taking it out of the proper perspective. Yet, there were four notable instances when The Times did just that. The Clark Clifford incident has already been discussed. However, not only did the initial disclosure of the statement receive undue emphasis, but The Times refused to let it drop, bringing it up in subsequent articles, even after the Administration had made an effort to clarify the President's comment.

The Clifford Timetable. The article reporting the news conference²³ stated that President Nixon implied that more

²³Frankel, "President Hopes Pullout," p. 1.

than 200,000 troops would be withdrawn by the end of 1970 (this figure based on Clifford's suggestion). The article went on to say that there were six questions on Vietnam, most of which related to the Clifford statements. Actually, there were eight questions related to Vietnam, three of which concerned Mr. Clifford.²⁴

The next day, June 21, The Times published an article on page one which reported an attempt by the Administration to clarify Nixon's comments.²⁵ The headlines read:

PRESIDENT'S AIDES DENY HE PLEDGED A PULLOUT BY 1970
 Upset By Impact of What They Insist Was Merely an
 Expression of Hope
 DISTORTION DISCERNED
 Senate Doves Said to Give a Hardened View to Stand on
 Troops in Vietnam

The statement by the Administration reiterated what the President had intended to say in the first place: that he was hopeful, but the decisions would be based on his three criteria, and that he would make no frivolous promises. What he had expressed was just a hope; to construe it as a pledge would weaken negotiations. Still, the reporter, Robert B. Semple, Jr., held to the stand that the text of the remarks indicated a "broader, more spacious" position than before, and that Nixon's statement may have resulted from either (1) an intention to withdraw unilaterally regardless of progress in Paris, or (2) an overreaction to the Clifford article.

²⁴Public Papers, pp. 470-480.

²⁵Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President's Aides Deny He Pledged A Pullout by 1970," New York Times, June 21, 1969, p. 1.

Whatever the reality of the intent of the remarks, The Times refused to let the matter drop. The comments were referred to in another article on July 21,²⁶ in which Senator Mike Mansfield criticized the President for "overreacting," and in an editorial column on June 22,²⁷ which said that Nixon's statement showed that he agreed with Clifford on the objective of getting out of Vietnam as soon as possible. But, more significantly, when Mr. Nixon announced the next troop withdrawal on September 16, 1969, the Clifford timetable became a measuring stick. In speculating on the size of the troop cut, a page one article published on September 16,²⁸ suggested that if 40,500 were withdrawn (a figure suggested by South Vietnam's Vice President Ky), it would leave 34,500 troops to be withdrawn in order to surpass the Clifford timetable. When the announcement was actually made of a 35,000 cut, the article reporting it²⁹ stated that sources said Nixon had not abandoned hope of the Clifford timetable, but no timetable would be declared. In a lead editorial on September 17, headlined "Another Lost Opportunity,"³⁰ the writer bemoaned the fact

²⁶"Nixon Is Accused of Overreacting," New York Times, June 21, 1969, p. 3.

²⁷James Reston, "President Nixon's First 5 Months," New York Times, June 22, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 14.

²⁸Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Will Announce Cut in Vietnam Force Today; Ky Puts Figure at 40,500," New York Times, September 16, 1969, p. 1.

²⁹Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Announces New Vietnam Cut of About 35,000," New York Times, September 17, 1969, p. 1.

³⁰"Another Lost Opportunity" (Editorial), New York Times, September 17, 1969, p. 46.

that the withdrawal was another "timid move," and that it fell "far short" of Clifford's timetable. Even as late as November 2, 1969, when The Times was anticipating the content of the important November 3 address, an article was run showing a chart of troop levels, including projections of Nixon and the suggestions of George Aiken and Clark Clifford.³¹

The implication of all of this is that in order to live up to expectations, Nixon must adhere to the Clifford timetable, a promise that the President had never intended to make in the first place, but one that The Times apparently would have had him make.

The Washington Post was also caught up in the President's remarks about the Clifford timetable. In fact, twelve of the fifteen articles and editorial comments that followed the June 19 news conference, referred in some way to Mr. Nixon and Mr. Clifford. Only two of these twelve, however, attached the same interpretation as The Times. The first, and most significant was in the report of the news conference. As was noted earlier, the headline itself expressed the "hope" for a pullout. The lead paragraph then read, "President Nixon said in a televised news conference last night that he hoped to beat a timetable calling for withdrawal of 100,000 American troops this year and all ground combat forces next year."³² The article called it the most

³¹"US Troops in Vietnam--What Is Their Future," New York Times, November 2, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 2.

³²Kilpatrick, "Nixon Is Hopeful," p. A1.

"optimistic statement to date" and stated further that Nixon had twice said he hoped to beat the Clifford timetable. An editorial column on June 23, also saw the statement as a kind of commitment. The writer, Stanley Karnow, praised the President and his plan for Vietnamization:

Though his aides later tried to tone down the meaning of his remarks, Mr. Nixon went even further in the same direction at his press conference last week, boldly asserting that he hopes to have every American combat soldier out of Vietnam before the end of next year.³³

Several of the other articles attempted to interpret the remarks in a different way. Three editorial columns³⁴ suggested Nixon made the statement only to win domestic political approval. Two of these, Oberdorfer and Evans/Novak, went on to say that such a tactic would harm rather than help the war effort.

One editorial writer, Chalmers M. Roberts, in a news analysis on June 20,³⁵ and in an editorial column two days later³⁶ saw the President's remarks as a reaction to the

³³Stanley Karnow, "Stability in Saigon Is Essential to Nixon's Withdrawal Plan," Washington Post, June 23, 1969, p. A23.

³⁴Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden, "Nixon's Clever Tactics on Key Issues Make Him Look Unbeatable in 1972," Washington Post, June 24, 1969, p. A19; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Nixon's Peace Efforts Thus Far Bring Only Thundering Silence in Hanoi," Washington Post, June 25, 1969, p. A21; Don Oberdorfer, "Political Lights Beginning to Go On in the White House," Washington Post, June 26, 1969, p. A25.

³⁵Chalmers M. Roberts, "Pressure Is On Nixon to End War But the Enemy Refuses to Negotiate," Washington Post, June 20, 1969, p. A13.

³⁶Chalmers M. Roberts, "The President's Mood," Washington Post, June 22, 1969, p. B7.

pressure to end the war. He said no one in the Administration was talking about such a withdrawal³⁷ and that Nixon let his pique at Clifford get the better of his judgment.³⁸ What's more, the "hope" would be widely translated as a pledge and "Mr. Nixon will be plagued by domestic doves to 'beat' the Clifford troop withdrawal proposals."³⁹

And indeed that was what happened. In spite of the diversity of interpretation by Post writers (which occurred not at all in The Times), nearly every later reference to the Clifford timetable tended to consider the President's "hope" to be a promise. Articles preceding both the September 25, 1969, news conference and the November 3 address, speculated whether Nixon would refer to his "hope" for 100,000 troops to be withdrawn that year and all ground troops to be out by 1970.⁴⁰ An editorial following the November 3 address thought the speech was encouraging if we consider that Nixon is hoping to beat the Clifford timetable.⁴¹

After a long explanation of the Administration's denials that Nixon's statements were anything more than a hope, Murrey

³⁷Roberts, "Pressure," p. A1.

³⁸Roberts, "Mood," p. B7.

³⁹Roberts, "Pressure," p. A13.

⁴⁰"Friday News Conference Scheduled by President," Washington Post, September 25, 1969, p. A13; Murrey Marder, "Unity Plea Is Seen in Viet Talk," Washington Post, November 2, 1969, pp. A1, A5.

⁴¹"The President and the War (Con't.)" (Editorial), Washington Post, November 5, 1969, p. A18.

Marder in a news analysis following the withdrawal announcement in December, 1969, headlined "Pace Short of Nixon's Own Hope," still insisted that the pace of pullout was nowhere near what was needed to get the troops out by the end of the year--but the language was nevertheless optimistic.⁴²

And an editorial column by Joseph Kraft on June 30, 1970, stated that Mr. Nixon was "lagging way behind" the target set in June, 1969.⁴³

Thus, an apparently impromptu remark by Richard Nixon in a news conference reached major importance with the emphasis given it by both The Times and The Post. Even The Post's attempt to explain its lack of importance seemed to give it emphasis.

Campus "Bums." On another occasion, President Nixon made a perhaps ill-advised comment to which The Times would again give emphasis. During the aftermath of the Cambodian action in May, 1970, which was filled with student protest and dissent, the President contrasted American soldiers which he called "the greatest" with "the bums" blowing up campuses.⁴⁴ The Times ran a front page story headlined, "Nixon Puts 'Bums' Label on Some College Radicals," specifically

⁴²Murrey Marder, "Pace Short of Nixon's Own Hope," Washington Post, December 16, 1969, pp. A1, A9.

⁴³Joseph Kraft, "Cambodian Operation Is Not 'Greatest Victory Yet Achieved'," Washington Post, June 30, 1970, p. A15.

⁴⁴Juan de Onis, "Nixon Puts 'Bums' Label on Some College Radicals," New York Times, May 2, 1970, p. 1.

about this remark (this particular issue of the newspaper carried seven front page articles about the war move which, it will be remembered, was a very unpopular action). Once again, Mr. Nixon made some attempt to clarify the statement several days later. This was reported in an article on May 9,⁴⁵ which carried remarks by Nixon that he supported the right of dissent and freedom of speech. When asked about the "bums" label, he explained he was referring to students engaging in violence and terrorism, and that perhaps "bums" was too kind a word. But by this time The Times had already referred to the label in three different articles,⁴⁶ all of which suggested that Nixon was encouraging alienation, dissent, and division by such tough name-calling. Even after the President's attempt to clarify the statement, The Times referred to it again on May 10.⁴⁷ If, indeed, The Times felt such comments increased the alienation of the protesters, the emphasis given to it by the paper blew the remark out of proportion and only served to compound the problem.

The Post treated the "bums" incident somewhat differently. It was also reported in a front page article,⁴⁸ but

⁴⁵Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President Backs Right to Dissent," New York Times, May 9, 1970, p. 1.

⁴⁶Anthony Lewis, "Cry, the Beloved Country," New York Times, May 2, 1970, p. 32; Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Makes a Fateful Indochina Decision," New York Times, May 3, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 1; James Reston, "A Confused Capitol," New York Times, May 4, 1970, p. 2.

⁴⁷Max Frankel, "Nixon: He Faces a Divided, Anguished Nation," New York Times, May 10, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 1.

⁴⁸"Nixon Denounces Campus 'Bums' Who Burn Books, Set Off Bombs," Washington Post, May 2, 1970, p. A1.

this article carried the text of the President's remarks in full. This in itself tends to put it in context. It was then referred to briefly, in passing, twice more, both times in editorials⁴⁹ which denounced the use of any device which would further alienate the students. Both editorials took the stance that Mr. Nixon should attempt to win the students, and not drive them further away. No further mention was made of the remark.

Rogers and Laird. Still a third incident should be noted when The Times played on an item that may or may not have been fact. Again following the Cambodian action, The Times ran an article on page one, May 6, headlined "Rogers and Laird Termed Doubtful," reporting that the current war decisions had been reached in an atmosphere of "confusion and dissension."⁵⁰ William Rogers and Melvin Laird, both Cabinet members, allegedly were among those with misgivings, fearing the effect on the domestic political situation. On May 7, an article was published in which Laird denied the report and stated he "supported fully" the President's decision.⁵¹ Yet, the article goes on to refute the denial, calling it "an apparent attempt to answer published reports

⁴⁹"Widening the War (on Students)," (Editorial), Washington Post, May 3, 1970, p. 86; "Student Protest: a Lesson at Yale" (Editorial), Washington Post, May 5, 1970, p. A16.

⁵⁰Max Frankel, "Rogers and Laird Termed Doubtful," New York Times, May 6, 1970, p. 1.

⁵¹William Beecher, "Doubt on Policy Denied by Laird," New York Times, May 7, 1970, p. 1.

that he had expressed misgivings," saying that Laird had not addressed the matter of his "private advice to the President," and stating that reports continued to circulate that Laird had been against the action. Then, finally, in a "review of the week" article on Sunday, May 10, Max Frankel, after describing "a nation in anguish," reported without question that Rogers and Laird had had misgivings about the Cambodian decision.⁵²

The only mention of anything related to this incident in The Post was an article about a special unit which helped the President make the Cambodian decision, which mentioned that it was rumored that Melvin Laird had favored sending only advisors into Cambodia rather than ground troops.⁵³

Central Headquarters. Perhaps one more item could be included as an idea both The Post and The Times chose to emphasize. In his speech announcing the use of American and South Vietnamese ground forces in Cambodia, President Nixon stated the object of the operation was to clean out enemy sanctuaries which were being used to launch troops and supplies into Vietnam. He said many of the ground operations were being manned by the South Vietnamese exclusively. Then, he continued:

There is one area, however, immediately above Parrot's Beak, where I have concluded that a combined American and South Vietnamese operation is necessary.

⁵²Frankel, "Anguished Nation," p. 1.

⁵³Don Oberdorfer, "Special Unit Helped Nixon on Decision," Washington Post, May 2, 1970, p. A1.

Tonight, American and South Vietnamese units will attack the headquarters for the entire Communist military operation in South Vietnam. This key control center has been occupied by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong for five years in blatant violation of Cambodia's neutrality.⁵⁴

Later, when the President proclaimed the success of the Cambodian venture, The Post, on three occasions,⁵⁵ questioned that success by stating that no mention was made of whether the Central Headquarters was found and/or destroyed. One writer, George C. Wilson, said Nixon had given the Headquarters as the reason for going into Cambodia in the first place. A similar observation was made twice in The Times.⁵⁶ The implication here is that Nixon's victory was not as great as he claimed because a major goal of the operation was not realized. However, the President had not stressed this as a major goal in the speech.

The decision of the newspapers to emphasize these four incidents, the Clifford timetable, the "Bums" label, Roger's and Laird's misgivings, and the Central Headquarters, had a potentially profound effect, particularly since they were all

⁵⁴Richard M. Nixon, "The Situation in Southeast Asia," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 6 (May 4, 1970), pp. 598-599.

⁵⁵George C. Wilson, "U.S. Will Continue Bombing Supply Routes in Cambodia," Washington Post, June 4, 1970, p. A13; Marquis Childs, "President's Positive Thinking May Reflect Wishes, Not Facts," Washington Post, June 8, 1970, p. A23; "Nixon Prods Hanoi; War Curb Is Voted," Washington Post, July 1, 1970, p. A9.

⁵⁶Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Describes Cambodian Drive as 'Great Success'," New York Times, June 4, 1970, p. 18; Anthony Lewis, "But 'Twas a Famous Victory," New York Times, June 6, 1970, p. 30.

relatively minor within the context of the entire situation. And it should be noted that all four were potentially harmful to the President and his message.

We move now to the final area of analysis in Chapter V--the area of interpretative reporting.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING

A popular misconception about newspapers, according to many modern journalists, is that a newspaper should be "objective" and report only the "facts." As Lester Markel, associate editor of The New York Times, states, the very selection of which facts to include in a story, which of the facts selected will constitute the lead of the story (the emphasis), the placement of the story in the paper, in short, those things covered, in chapters three and four, all are exercises in judgment, all are very "unobjective."¹ This "unobjectivity" when carried into reporting itself is called interpretative reporting. Interpretative reporting involves more than the observation of overt happenings; it brings to a story a special insight, an understanding, an explanation, the ordinary individual would usually not see. As Curtis MacDougall explains in his book, Interpretative Reporting:

To interpret the news it is necessary to understand it, and understanding means more than just the ability to define the jargon used by persons in different walks of life. It involves recognizing the particular event as one of a series with both a cause and an effect. . . . If the gatherer of information is well informed . . . he

¹Quoted in Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 17-18.

will at least be aware of the fact that an item of news is not an isolated incident but one inevitably linked to a chain of important events.²

Thus, it is the job of a reporter to place an event in the larger flow of events, discussing its setting, its sequence, and its significance. This can be of great benefit to the reader in understanding the news. However, MacDougall cautions that the reporter "cannot succeed if he is hampered by prejudices and stereotyped attitudes which would bias his perception of human affairs."³

The word "reporter," for the purpose of this analysis will be defined broadly. Although some attempt probably should be made to separate the writers of news stories and the writers of editorials and editorial columns, it is a difficult task when dealing with The New York Times and The Washington Post. In these two papers, virtually every article of any importance or complexity (as opposed to the simple relaying of information, such as the reporting of Hanoi's reaction to a Nixon statement) carried a by-line. This, according to most journalists, gives the writer license to interject some opinion. Although many of the articles in both papers were not labeled as editorializing--a "news analysis," or an "editorial column"--they contained the same kinds of analyses that are normally found in editorial comment, i.e., interpretative reporting.

²MacDougall, p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 14.

It should be noted that The Washington Post contained a minimum of interpretation in the articles reporting the Nixon statements themselves. Most of these articles stated nothing except what the President or his staff had said, and in no instance did any interpretation affect the objectivity of the story. The Times, on the other hand, consistently speculated on, interpreted, and reacted to Nixon's remarks.

Thus, the materials dealt with in this chapter will include all kinds of by-lined articles, including editorial columns and editorials themselves, although they carry no signature.

This final area of concern, interpretative reporting, per se, should be examined because this interpretation greatly increases the rhetorical quality of reporting. The Times and The Post writers frequently dealt with implications, possible effects and possible motivations of the Nixon statements. Two interpretative areas to be covered in this chapter which emerged as being particularly significant were analyses of Nixon himself and of the President's motives.

Nixon the Man

One of the more interesting areas of interpretation (judgment, if you will) related to Richard Nixon himself. For years Nixon had a reputation for being a hard-line, Communist fighter, stemming from his involvement in the Alger Hiss affair and subsequent events. Undoubtedly many people had difficulty seeing him in the new role of a conciliatory

peace-maker, although this was a role much of the public and certainly the press would prefer. Hence, the tendency was there to compare the "old" and the "new" Nixon. When a change from the "old" Nixon was indicated, The New York Times approved. In a news analysis of the Inaugural Address, James Reston said happily this was not the Nixon of the campaign; not the "hawkish, political, combative, anti-Communist, anti-Democratic" Nixon of the past.⁴ But if Nixon took an action of which The Times disapproved, he became the "old Nixon" again. For example, following the Cambodian drive, the lead paragraph of an article by Robert B. Semple, Jr., said observers had speculated since Nixon came to grips with Vietnam "whether, in the end, his political appreciation of the rising discontent in the nation would prove more persuasive than his residual views as a cold warrior and his long-held convictions about the strategic necessity of the war effort."⁵ He goes on to say that for months the betting had been that Nixon was on the way out of Vietnam, but now, after the Cambodian speech, there was doubt. James Reston, no longer happy, said in a news analysis on May 4, 1970, that Nixon appeared to be falling back on the old anti-Communist, anti-intellectual, antiuniversity, antinewspaper and antitele-

⁴James Reston, "From Partisan to President of All," New York Times, January 21, 1969, p. 1.

⁵Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Makes a Fateful Indo-China Decision," New York Times, May 3, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 1.

vision line to prove his point.⁶

The Washington Post made two indirect references to the "old" Nixon--both in reaction to the November 3 address. Chalmers M. Roberts spoke of "the real anti-Communist Richard M. Nixon."⁷ He judged the President to be still anti-Communist, but said if the Silent Majority were also, then Nixon's gamble, the speech, would pay off. An editorial the following day called the speech "vintage Nixon."⁸ It complained that there needed to be something new in the address, but that there hadn't been. These were the only times The Post made such a reference, while "old" vs. "new" Nixon occurred periodically in The Times.

Besides comparing the President with his own past image, the newspapers occasionally likened Nixon to Lyndon Johnson, the man held responsible for U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In June, 1969, just prior to the Midway announcement, in a seeming attempt to speculate about what the Midway meeting would produce, Robert Semple wrote an article for The Times headlined: "Nixon and Vietnam; At What Point Will It Become His War?" Even the headline suggests Nixon was about to assume the responsibility that had been Johnson's. He goes on in the

⁶James Reston, "A Confused Capitol," New York Times, May 4, 1970, p. 2.

⁷Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Home Front Impact," Washington Post, November 4, 1969, p. A1.

⁸"The President and the War (Con't)" (Editorial), Washington Post, November 5, 1969, p. A18.

article to say that critics were becoming restive and Nixon must do something to break Johnson's bind. He said the war was beginning to limit Nixon and he paralleled Nixon's activities with Johnson's. Nixon had recently delivered two speeches to "sanctuaries of unalloyed patriotism" (the Air Force Academy and a college in South Dakota). These and the Midway meeting were similar to events during Johnson's term in office.⁹ All of this seems to take the form of a warning: if Nixon would not take the proper step (a withdrawal announcement), he would soon face the Johnson fate.

Later, following the November 3 address when Nixon's course was clearer, an editorial complained that the speech was disappointing, that it looked like a formula for continued war; it showed no new initiatives, but reiterated the position in terms reminiscent of Johnson and Dean Rusk.¹⁰ James Reston in an editorial column on November 5, also complained that the speech sounded like Johnson.¹¹ The implication here, of course, is that if Nixon sounds like Johnson, he's not saying the right things. For Johnson's position was indeed an unpopular one.

⁹Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon & Vietnam; At What Point Will It Become His War?" New York Times, June 8, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 1.

¹⁰"Mr. Nixon's 'Plan for Peace'" (Editorial), New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 44.

¹¹James Reston, "Nixon's Mystifying Clarifications," New York Times, November 5, 1969, p. 46.

The Washington Post on a few occasions also compared Nixon to Johnson. Probably the strongest use of this technique in The Post was made by Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden in a column preceeding the final Cambodian report in June, 1970. The writers predicted Nixon would tell the public the United States was out of Cambodia and the operation was an enormous success. They said it was exactly what Johnson would have told us: "It is perhaps not fair to say that Mr. Nixon has been Johnsonized, though ever since the Cambodian operation began, he has sounded more and more like his predecessor."¹² They concluded that both Presidents had been caught in a situation where they had to shade the truth to seem strong; we could thus count another President among the war's casualties.

Except for this one instance in The Post, the allusions to Johnson were minor and occasionally favorable to Nixon. In a news analysis of the May 14, 1969, address, Chalmers M. Roberts commented that much of the tone sounded hard, there was some Johnson.¹³ The general tone of the article, however, was favorable. Roberts referred to this same speech again as he was predicting what the President would do in his Novem-

¹²Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden, "Nixon is Caught in Same Situation As Johnson Was in Southeast Asia," Washington Post, June 30, 1970, p. A15.

¹³Chalmers M. Roberts, "Troop, Political Proposals Could Open Way to Peace," Washington Post, May 15, 1969, p. A1.

ber 3 address. He repeated that the May 14 speech had used a great deal of "sternly worded Johnsonian linguistics," but that the speech had, on the whole, opened new possibilities for compromise with the Communists.¹⁴ In fact, in an article on May 18, 1969, Roberts stated that the deliberately obscure and ambiguous speech had represented a "major scaling down of policies from Johnson."¹⁵

Another contrast with Johnson was used in an editorial following the May 14 address. It said that even though the Government was still not "leveling," the speech was a marked improvement on Nixon's predecessor.¹⁶

Thus, we might conclude that The Times used the technique to attack Mr. Nixon while The Post on occasion used it to laud him. In any case, the remarks always came out as unfavorable to Mr. Johnson.

Nixon's Motives

Probably the most significant area of interpretative reporting used in The Post's and The Times' treatment of the Nixon statements was the assignment of motive or purpose to the President's actions concerning Vietnam.

¹⁴Chalmers M. Roberts, "The President's Speech," Washington Post, November 2, 1969, p. B7.

¹⁵Chalmers M. Roberts, "US Eases Stand on Viet Coalition," Washington Post, May 18, 1969, p. B1.

¹⁶"The President and the War" (Editorial), Washington Post, May 16, 1969, p. A24.

During the honeymoon period of Nixon's term of office, The Times worked under the assumption that Nixon's purpose was pure--that he intended to fulfill the campaign promise to end the war as quickly as possible. For example, a news analysis by Max Frankel following the news conference on March 5, 1969, offered the sub-headline: "He Frankly Pursues a Cooperative and Reasoned Peace."¹⁷ Frankel went on to say Nixon wanted to get the war over as soon as possible without leaving the seeds of another war. He did say the President was prepared to take the time to demonstrate to the enemy that the United States was not as desperate as they might think, but that he showed no signs of escalating the battle. The whole tone of the article was one of optimism, as was most coverage at that time.

As time passed and no positive action was forthcoming, The Times turned more to a discussion of the purpose of the Nixon statements. The newspaper apparently began to doubt that the President really intended to end the war, but that his purpose was less pure: namely that Nixon was simply working to gain time, to win support, to calm critics. It should be remembered from chapter two that this was indeed probably a purpose of Nixon's, but that the President viewed it as a means to an end, i.e., buying time to allow Vietnamization to work. The Times, on the other hand, treated it as an end in itself, a delaying tactic rather than an effort

¹⁷Max Frankel, "Nixon Foreign-Affairs Gambles," New York Times, March 6, 1969, p. 15.

to end the war in a manner The Times saw fit. This interpretation gradually became more and more prominent during the year between May, 1969, and May, 1970.

An early inkling of this occurred surrounding the May 14, 1969, speech. In an article announcing that the speech would be given, Robert Semple wrote that the White House had made clear that no troop withdrawals would be announced.¹⁸ Semple goes on to speculate why the speech had been scheduled if there was to be no important announcement. Among the possible reasons, he includes an attempt to calm increasingly restive war critics and to purchase more time for bargaining. Another article prior to the speech suggested the speech was "part of the Administration's effort to explain to the public why it is moving cautiously in Paris and why it needs more time to reach a satisfactory Vietnam settlement."¹⁹

When the speech was actually reported,²⁰ Robert Semple stated that the White House refused to characterize the address as an assurance that progress was being made in order to purchase time for negotiations. Yet Semple quoted a passage from the speech which he saw as a "direct bid for continued patience."²¹ Another article on May 18, saw the

¹⁸Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President Sees Abrams on War; To Talk to Nation," New York Times, May 13, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁹"Lodge Returning for Instructions on Paris Parley," New York Times, May 14, 1969, pp. 1, 9.

²⁰Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Sees Troop Pullout in A Year and Would Join Vietnam Political Talks," New York Times, May 15, 1969, pp. 1, 16.

²¹Ibid., p. 16.

speech as an attempt to quiet America and to buy time for negotiation.²²

None of these interpretations made the President's apparent purpose sound "ignoble," it was simply reported as a legitimate reason. However, when the announcements of withdrawals finally began, The Times no longer saw "buying time" as a legitimate purpose. Just prior to the Midway announcement, Robert Semple wrote an article speculating about what would come out of the meeting with South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu. He pointed out the increasingly restive critics at home and suggested Nixon was "hurrying" to the Midway meeting "to help dispel doubts among his critics at home that he is serious about bringing the war to an end."²³ Semple recognized the need for continued loyalty from the American people. An announcement of withdrawal would help to maintain that loyalty. Semple concludes:

The unpleasant fact remains that to negotiate and codify even these modest objectives will take a great deal of time. Accordingly, President Nixon needs public support, and this is why there has been so much talk about the possibility of major American withdrawals growing out of the Midway talks."²⁴ (Emphasis mine.)

²²Hedrick Smith, "Targets at Home and Abroad for Nixon's Peace Initiative," New York Times, May 18, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 2.

²³Semple, "His War," p. 1.

²⁴Ibid.

The actual announcement seemed to be regarded by The Times as primarily a bid for public support and not as a particularly effective means to end the war. An article by Semple on June 10, stated that the hope of the meeting at Midway had been to ease political pressure at home while preserving negotiating flexibility. But he goes on to say that the announcement represented a "modest downpayment" on Nixon's promise to disengage.²⁵

Hedrick Smith, also of The Times, in a news analysis, agreed the announcement had undoubtedly bought time with the American people, but questioned whether it would move negotiations in Paris toward a settlement.²⁶ Smith concluded that some Americans thought a coalition commission to supervise elections was the key to peace but that Nixon had made no mention of this. It should be noted that frequently in both The Times and The Post, a writer would mention an alternate solution to a Nixon proposal, as Smith did here. More often than not, this related to some kind of political settlement which many writers believed was the key issue preventing negotiation, as Nixon remained committed to the Thieu government. This technique, in several instances, indirectly questioned Nixon's purpose--i.e., if the President were truly serious about ending the war, he would be trying these methods.

²⁵Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Military Briefing for Nixon," New York Times, June 10, 1969, p. 16.

²⁶Hedrick Smith, "After the Midway Talks," New York Times, June 10, 1969, p. 16.

Finally, in another news analysis following Midway, Max Frankel saw the announcement as a gain in time from the public but as a delay in making a real choice in ending the war. If critics of the tactic were correct in their position that it would not work, Nixon would be driven nearer "the hard choice that he has so far sought to avoid."²⁷

The article reporting the second troop withdrawal on September 16, pointed out that Nixon's critics believed that his refusal to set a definite timetable for withdrawal was designed to calm students, to allow time for negotiations, and to enable him to prolong the war indefinitely.²⁸

Again, following the withdrawal announcement of September 16, Tom Wicker, in an editorial column, criticized the President for another token withdrawal and for his insistence on the right of South Vietnam to self-determination. Wicker saw this proviso as so significant it made the withdrawal insignificant. He saw the announcement only as an effort "to soothe homefront dissent, particularly on the campus, and not as a major bid for a settlement."²⁹ As Smith had done in June, Wicker suggested a broad-gauged coalition body might have been appropriate. At least, he wrote, ex-

²⁷Max Frankel, "Two Paths for Nixon," New York Times, June 11, 1969, p. 2.

²⁸Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Announces New Vietnam Cut of About 35,000," New York Times, September 17, 1969, p. 1.

²⁹Tom Wicker, "The Mountain and the Mouse," New York Times, September 18, 1969, p. 46.

panded withdrawals or a bombing halt would have marked an unmistakable de-escalation.

By the fall of 1969, it will be remembered, public dissent was becoming more vocal. Nixon undoubtedly felt more than ever the need for public support, and The Times gave increasing emphasis to what it perceived as the President's purpose to win time and support. The more this idea was emphasized, the more self-serving it appeared to be.

The headline reporting the news conference of September 26, read: "Nixon Asks Public to Give Him Time for Ending War." The lead paragraph stated: "President Nixon urged the public today to give him the support and the time he feels he needs to end the war in Vietnam honorably."³⁰ Nixon had directed actions in recent months, the article went on, to the goal of public support (i.e., withdrawals and the draft reduction). But critics were convinced the Nixon plan would not work, one factor being that the strategy would take more time than the public could accept. In a Sunday "review of the week" article on September 28, 1969, Max Frankel stressed again Nixon's appeal for "time, time, time." He said the President "pleaded" in his news conference for more time and an end to attitudes of "defeatism." Nixon had tried to keep the war from becoming "his" by buying time with troop withdrawals and draft reductions. Frankel goes on to say that no

³⁰Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Asks Public to Give Him Time for Ending War," New York Times, September 27, 1969, p. 1.

one doubted the President's intentions--but critics were attacking his "timetable, tactics and residual objective." Critics had become more active, according to Frankel, because, among other reasons, "Mr. Nixon's very effort to appease American opinion only called attention to the modest pace of his contemplated disengagement."³¹

By the November 3 address, criticism was at an all-time high, and many, including The Times, had become impatient with the President's appeals for patience, deciding they were a substitute for action.

Prior to the speech, Max Frankel wrote that although there had been lively speculation that the President might offer some drastic new course of action in Vietnam, it was likely that he would "run right up the middle to gain some yardage and time for further maneuver."³² He went on to say the speech was a response to public pressure and that that pressure had come earlier than Nixon had expected. But Frankel implied the amount of concern the President held for public opinion would be determined by how much further he went beyond citing the steps he had already taken (the implication being that if Nixon did not broaden the action, his concern for the public was limited). Vietnamization might turn out to be a cover for a transfer of burdens which

³¹Max Frankel, "Now It Is 'Nixon's War'," New York Times, September 28, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 1.

³²Max Frankel, "What to Listen for Tomorrow Night," New York Times, November 2, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 2.

would allow the war to go on at considerable cost to the United States.

The report of the speech on November 4, 1969, page one, was headlined: NIXON CALLS FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT AS HE PURSUES HIS VIETNAM PLAN ON A SECRET PULLOUT TIMETABLE. And a sub-headline: "Policy Unchanged."

The disappointment in the continuation of policy was apparent. In at least two articles, Nixon was accused of a deliberate attempt to polarize the nation and to confront rather than to compromise with the critics.³³ Again, this tactic was made to seem self-serving. For The Times, an attempt to rally support behind a plan which they considered inadequate, could only be called ignoble, an effort to delay an action they felt should be taken, i.e., compromise and withdrawal.

The Washington Post also discussed the winning of time and public support as a purpose of President Nixon's. However, less of a pattern emerges, perhaps because it is mentioned less than half as often during the period between the May 14 and November 3 addresses of 1969. The references to it are also less judgmental than those of The Times.

An article by Carroll Kilpatrick speculates before the May 14 speech that the President will ask for patience as

³³James Reston, "Nixon Makes His Stand," New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 1; John W. Finney, "Nixon and the War; The Critics: It Is Not a Plan to End US Involvement," New York Times, November 9, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 1.

efforts are made to speed negotiations from their "snail's pace."³⁴ In reporting that speech, Kilpatrick related that the President had asked the public for patience, but the article offered no reaction to or implications of the speech. "Patience On Peace Is Urged" was printed as a sub-headline.³⁵

Two articles (one an editorial column) with negative overtones reacting to the Midway announcement in June, 1969, remarked on Nixon's hope to buy time from the public. Chalmers M. Roberts advanced the thought that many questions were left unanswered, especially concerning political decisions in South Vietnam. He said the emphasis in the announcement was placed on the troop withdrawals because the President hoped to buy more negotiating time with the public and Congress. According to Gresham's Law, Roberts continued, the good news of the withdrawals drowned out the possible bad news of the political problems. The ultimate worth of that was yet to be determined, however.³⁶ Joseph Alsop said in his column that although the U.S. Army did not totally support the idea of the withdrawal, it wanted to help Nixon "to gain time." With another announcement scheduled in the fall, it was like the old Russian lady who threw a child to the wolves occasionally to stave them

³⁴Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Sets Major Talk on Vietnam," Washington Post, May 13, 1969, p. A1.

³⁵Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Asks Mutual Viet Pullout," Washington Post, May 15, 1969, p. A1.

³⁶Chalmers M. Roberts, "Questions Remain on Viet Elections," Washington Post, June 9, 1969, p. A18.

off.³⁷ Neither of these articles emphasized or were overly critical of the time-buying nature of the withdrawals, although both obviously had some negative reaction to it. Both were pleased withdrawals had begun despite reservations about the total policy.

Even in the tumultuous autumn of 1969, The Post reported Mr. Nixon's appeal to public unity matter-of-factly, almost casually, without judgment of it. The headline reporting the September 26 news conference, as did that of The New York Times, chose to emphasize this theme: "Nixon Asks U.S. Unity For Peace."³⁸ An editorial column by Chalmers M. Roberts the same day noted that facing public pressure, Nixon was gambling that the people would unite behind him on the war. Roberts called it a test of wills and suggested that Nixon believed: "If the domestic gamble works, then the stand-fast gamble with the Communists will work." For Nixon it could be "triumph or tragedy."³⁹

Two articles prior to the November 3 address predicted Nixon would plea for unity⁴⁰ and more time,⁴¹ both without

³⁷Joseph Alsop, "Further Troop Withdrawal Is Expected in Autumn," Washington Post, June 11, 1969, p. A27.

³⁸Chalmers M. Roberts, "Nixon Asks US Unity for Peace," Washington Post, September 27, 1969, p. A1.

³⁹Chalmers M. Roberts, "Nixon Is Gambling That Public Will Unite Behind Him on War," Washington Post, September 27, 1969, p. A15.

⁴⁰Murrey Marder, "Unity Plea Is Seen In Viet Talk," Washington Post, November 2, 1969, p. A1.

⁴¹"President Polishes Vietnam Address," Washington Post, November 3, 1969, p. A2.

further comment about it. An editorial column by Stephen S. Rosenfeld following the address agreed it was an attempt to swing support behind his policy, but Rosenfeld considered this minor and focused his remarks on what he saw as Nixon's "confrontation" foreign policy.⁴²

The Post made at least five references to the President's attempts to gain time and support during 1970, and it is interesting to compare and contrast them with those during 1969, when The Times was so preoccupied with this perceived purpose.

Following the April 20, 1970, speech announcing further pullouts, an editorial complained that the troop numbers had caught the headlines--as they were intended to do. Leaving the specific timetable open would calm the critics and buy time with generals and voters without holding the Administration accountable. This "shell game" had been played this way from the beginning. It was now time for the Administration to define realistic and concrete goals.⁴³

An article preceding the June 3, 1970, interim Cambodian report was assessed, since it would contain no new announcements, as a "further attempt to calm domestic opinion," consistent with other efforts the past weeks to reassure the

⁴²Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "Mr. Nixon Regards His 'Seventh Crisis'," Washington Post, November 7, 1969, p. A26.

⁴³"Vietnam: A Fresh Note and a Tired Refrain" (Editorial), Washington Post, April 22, 1970, p. A18.

public.⁴⁴ Both these articles strike a familiar note.

However, when President Nixon announced the appointment of David K. E. Bruce as ambassador to the Paris Peace Talks, a move applauded generally by both The Times and The Post, Joseph Kraft, a columnist for The Post, saw the action as nothing more than "a move to gain still more time for winning the war--a peace offensive." (Emphasis mine.) (Kraft would favor a solution involving a change in the Saigon government.) The time would be won for Vietnamization--which would mean "an American presence in the Vietnam war for years and years and years to come."⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Kraft also opposed the October 7, 1970, cease-fire proposal (which received overwhelming support from The Times) as another attempt to buy time for the present policy, i.e., maintaining the war.⁴⁶ Granted, these are the opinions of one columnist, but neither of these actions of President Nixon were considered to be "time or support buyers" by any writer for The New York Times. On the contrary, they were richly praised.

A final comment by The Post concerning Nixon's attempts at winning support should be noted. In an editorial following the Cambodian operation, the writer said he did not quarrel

⁴⁴Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Speaks Wednesday on Indochina," Washington Post, June 1, 1970, p. A1, A8.

⁴⁵Joseph Kraft, "Vietnam Window Dressing," Washington Post, July 5, 1970, p. D7.

⁴⁶Joseph Kraft, "Wasted Opportunity," Washington Post, October 11, 1970, p. D7.

with the President's attempts to make his military choices politically attractive or to mobilize public support behind what he was doing. But because Nixon had gone on the attack, he had seemingly narrowed support rather than enlarged it:

On the eve of a venture that begs for public unity and political support, the President has done his bit to promote public animosities and divisions, going out of his way to alienate further those very persons who were bound to be least hospitable to his decision.⁴⁷

The Post writer seems to be saying that the Cambodian operation needed all the support the President could muster, yet he had estranged a group he needed to win. The Times, it will be remembered, also objected to Mr. Nixon's "polarization" tactic surrounding the November 3 address. But never did The Times advocate or even imply that the critics should rally around the President's decision. Instead, The Times seemed always to support the critics' position, and to suggest that Nixon needed to compromise his own position.

Cambodia, April 30, 1970. Following the period of intense criticism in the fall of 1969, by The New York Times, as Vietnamization with its withdrawals continued on its course, and as Nixon seemed impervious to the opposition, the outcry against the Nixon policy appeared to abate, as did the attacks by The Times on the President's motives and purpose. However, with the Cambodian action in May, 1970, there came a vigorous new anger against Nixon's reasons for the "invasion." From the outset, the President insisted the action

⁴⁷"Widening the War (on Students)" (Editorial), Washington Post, May 3, 1970, p. B6.

was limited to achieve a specific goal: to find and destroy the supply sanctuaries just inside the border of Cambodia.

But the distrust of the "old" and now the "new" Richard Nixon arose with renewed strength. At least five editorials and editorial columns decried the action as an escalation and expansion of the war.⁴⁸ One called it a "virtual renunciation" of the President's promise of disengagement and of the Nixon Doctrine itself.⁴⁹ Another said the arguments sounded like those heard at every stage before and agreed it was a rejection of the Nixon Doctrine. The action was not that of the "new" Nixon who campaigned for peace, but of the "old" Nixon of 1954. Furthermore, time and bitter experience had exhausted the credulity of the American people and Congress--the President's actions spoke louder than his assurances.⁵⁰ Still another said Nixon was widening the war on a pledge of peace,⁵¹ and Tom Wicker said the action made clear that Nixon never had had a "plan to end the war," that Nixon, like Johnson, wanted "to strike a fatal military blow" to drive North

⁴⁸"Escalation in Indochina..." (Editorial), New York Times, April 30, 1970, p. 34; "Military Hallucination--Again" (Editorial), New York Times, May 1, 1970, p. 34; "Cambodian Quagmire..." (Editorial), New York Times, May 2, 1970, p. 32; Tom Wicker, "In the Nation: Further Into the Quagmire," New York Times, May 3, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 15; "Compulsive Escalation" (Editorial), New York Times, May 4, 1970, p. 36.

⁴⁹"Escalation," ibid., p. 34.

⁵⁰"Military Hallucination," p. 34.

⁵¹"Compulsive Escalation," p. 36.

Vietnam to its knees.⁵² In short, the President, typically, had reneged on his pledge to end the war and was, instead, escalating it. This was stressed despite the President's assurances that the action would be ended within thirty days.

Interestingly enough, The Washington Post only once called the Cambodian operation an "escalation" of the war. This was in an editorial column by Joseph Kraft who consistently wrote that he believed Nixon intended to stay in the war.⁵³

On the contrary, The Post on several occasions stated it could agree with the military objective of the Cambodian operation.⁵⁴ What The Post seemed to fear was a commitment by the United States to support the shaky Lon Nol government in Cambodia, to protect it from Communism. An editorial on June 5, 1970, stated the "real reason" for the operation was to keep the Cambodian government out of Communist hands--a political goal requiring a sustained American effort.⁵⁵ An

⁵²Wicker, "Into the Quagmire," p. 15.

⁵³Joseph Kraft, "Aides Failed a Weak President by Not Fighting Escalation," Washington Post, May 5, 1970, p. A17.

⁵⁴For example: "Vietnam: The President's Interim Report I" (Editorial), Washington Post, June 5, 1970, p. A22; "Vietnam: The President's Interim Report II" (Editorial), Washington Post, June 8, 1970, p. A22; "Cambodia: The President's Report" (Editorial), Washington Post, July 1, 1970, p. A18; Marquis Childs, "Nixon Military Balance Sheet Ignores Misery in Cambodia," Washington Post, July 4, 1970, p. A13.

⁵⁵"The President's Interim Report I," p. A22.

editorial column by Marquis Childs agreed: it seemed an attempt to "prop up" the Lon Nol government, requiring continued American support.⁵⁶ At least one editorial column, a news article, and an editorial supported this view.⁵⁷

This might be interpreted as a fear of escalation of the war. But this reaction came in response to the President's statement that the United States would continue air support to Cambodia after all troops had been withdrawn,⁵⁸ and not to the operation itself, which The Times saw as an expansion of the ground war. The President insisted throughout that the use of the ground forces was limited and that any continued support was to protect the American men in Vietnam by preventing buildup in Cambodia.

Besides a widening of the war itself, The New York Times went on to assign another motive to Mr. Nixon's decision to move troops into Cambodia. They speculated that he did it as a "show of strength," both in himself and in the country. Tom Wicker⁵⁹ and Max Frankel⁶⁰ suggested that he was proving

⁵⁶Marquis Childs, "President's Positive Thinking May Reflect Wishes, Not Facts," Washington Post, June 8, 1970, p. A23.

⁵⁷George C. Wilson, "US Warns Hanoi of Long Struggle," Washington Post, July 1, 1970, p. A1; "Cambodia: The President's Report," p. A18; Childs, "Nixon Military Balance Sheet....," p. A13.

⁵⁸"Nixon Prods Hanoi; War Curb Is Voted," Washington Post, July 1, 1970, p. A1.

⁵⁹Wicker, "Into the Quagmire," p. 15

⁶⁰Max Frankel, "President's Gamble: Wider War to End It More Quickly," New York Times, April 30, 1970, p. 2.

to the world that the United States was still strong, Frankel believing it to be a reaction to try to counterbalance the domestic dissent and rebellion in Congress. Frankel wrote on this theme in two subsequent articles. In a news analysis on May 2, 1970, he said Nixon feared he would be "found wanting" by an antagonist in this nuclear age, that division and dissent at home would be misread as "weakness."⁶¹ And later he wrote that the action was to give long range benefits, that "by summertime or election time" all this "shrewd calculation would be self-evident and power, resolve, character and toughness of the United States and its President would have been demonstrated before all the world."⁶²

The feeling seemed to be that once again the motive was personal and less than noble. For The Times, "show of strength," an attempt to "prove oneself" was not necessary or desirable as a means to end the war. Anthony Lewis summed it up in an editorial column on May 2. He said the Cambodian action made the war a test of Nixon's and the nation's manhood. Lewis preferred to believe in reason: the only way to demonstrate strength in Indochina was by getting out. He concluded: "Maturity, dignity, character and wisdom are shown not by rage but by restraint."⁶³

⁶¹Max Frankel, "Behind the President's Decision," New York Times, May 2, 1970, p. 6.

⁶²Max Frankel, "Nixon: He Faces a Divided, Anguished Nation," New York Times, May 10, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 1.

⁶³Anthony Lewis, "Cry, the Beloved Country," New York Times, May 2, 1970, p. 32.

The Washington Post on only one occasion agreed with this analysis. Joseph Kraft, in an editorial column, wrote that although an historic case could be made from the Cambodian operation, the President instead chose to enter "a highly defensive personal plea for self-vindication." He continued: "Mr. Nixon is trying to prove a point about himself. He is trying to show that he is a tough guy, a fellow that can't be humiliated, a leader who won't stand for being pushed around, a giant who is not pitiful and helpless."⁶⁴ This assessment came after the final Cambodian report and not at the time of the operation, as did all The Times' statements.

Instead, The Washington Post mentioned several times the personal risk President Nixon had taken in making the Cambodian decision. Don Oberdorfer, in an article headlined "Nixon Risks Political Future, Renewed Dissension on War," said of all Nixon's gambles, this was the most daring and most perilous. If he succeeded (meaning that North Vietnam would "fade away" or negotiate), he would be a hero; if he failed, it would rekindle a blazing national debate.⁶⁵ This article accompanied an insert in the paper which quoted Nixon's statement from the speech:

I would rather be a one-term President and do what I believe is right than to be a two-term President at the

⁶⁴Joseph Kraft, "Nixon Cambodia Report Backs Impression of a Weak Leader," Washington Post, July 2, 1970, p. A15.

⁶⁵Don Oberdorfer, "Nixon Risks Political Future, Renewed Dissension on War," Washington Post, May 1, 1970, p. A1.

cost of seeing America become a second-rate power and see this nation accept the first defeat in its proud 190-year history.

In a column praising highly the operation, William S. White wrote that Nixon had "become fully and finally the President of the United States of America." He called it Nixon's "simple duty," and stated that the President had said "to hell with two-bit politics at an hour when all Southeast Asia, and perhaps Israel as well, is in grave danger."⁶⁶ Joseph Alsop called the move "brave" with grave risks but a potentially huge pay-off.⁶⁷ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak wrote that the military gamble in Cambodia was solidly based but that the political gamble on the homefront was more dangerous with higher stakes. Nixon would have to win that political gamble to make the military pay-off worthwhile.⁶⁸

The Times mentioned this risk on two occasions. Max Frankel in a news analysis⁶⁹ said Nixon was expanding the war in hopes of ending it more quickly.⁷⁰ C. L. Sulzberger also saw the operation as a risky way for Nixon to retain credibility:

⁶⁶William S. White, "Nixon Ignores 1970 Politics, Bites the Bullet on Cambodia," Washington Post, May 2, 1970, p. A13.

⁶⁷Joseph Alsop, "Nixon's Cambodian Decision Is Brave and May Be Lucky," Washington Post, May 4, 1970, p. A23.

⁶⁸Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Nixon's Political Gamble Appears More Perilous Than Military One," Washington Post, May 6, 1970, p. A25.

⁶⁹Frankel, "President's Gamble," p. 2.

⁷⁰Emphasis mine. Although Frankel discussed the risk, he also labeled the operation as a widening of the war.

If Nixon can swiftly smash the sanctuaries outside Vietnam without dangerous escalation or confrontations elsewhere, he will ultimately emerge triumphant at home as well as overseas. Nothing succeeds like success but, if he fails, nothing fails like failure.⁷¹

Cease-Fire Proposal, October 7, 1970. Nixon finally did something of which The New York Times highly approved, i.e., the proposal of a stand-still cease-fire on October 7, 1970. The reactions of the newspaper became highly favorable, swinging in quite the opposite direction from where it had been. Three editorials praising the plan were published. One called it "a major new initiative."⁷² Another said the war and peace talks had been "transformed" in the world's eyes."⁷³

Two articles appeared reporting the overwhelmingly favorable reaction to the plan from Congress and American newspapers.⁷⁴ The only negative reactions reported came from the Communists and the Pentagon. Even Mr. Nixon's motives for the action were praised, because now he was obviously interested in settling the war.⁷⁵

⁷¹C. L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: The Edge of the Knife," New York Times, May 3, 1970, p. 14.

⁷²"A Plan to End the War" (Editorial), New York Times, October 8, 1970, p. 46.

⁷³"Challenge to Hanoi" (Editorial), New York Times, October 11, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 12.

⁷⁴Terence Smith, "US Bids Soviet Aid on Indochina," New York Times, October 9, 1970, p. 1; "Nixon Gets Wide Press Support on Truce," New York Times, October 9, 1970, p. 12.

⁷⁵Max Frankel, "Question Is Raised: Why Now?" New York Times, October 8, 1970, p. 18; Anthony Lewis, "What Mr. Nixon Could Mean," New York Times, October 10, 1970, p. 25.

The point to be remembered here is that although the President did suggest a major new proposal with the cease-fire, this was the only new element in the Vietnamization plan. It may have been offered at this particular time because the United States and South Vietnam held a distinct military advantage. Nixon remained committed to self-determination for South Vietnam. Yet, an editorial on October 11, said that although on the surface nothing had changed, there was a profound psychological change. Nixon had taken a posture, it said, most Americans could accept. And the crux of the proposal was the offer of an important political role to the Communists in South Vietnam after the war.⁷⁶

The Washington Post was not nearly so enthusiastic about the proposal. An editorial on October 9, 1970, said that even though the plan might offer something for peace, no one would know until Nixon had removed the ambiguity of the proposal. It might instead be that the President's "carefully timed, meticulously prepared, widely touted new approach to peace" was not only old hat but "politically inspired."⁷⁷

Thus, while The Times once again assigned "pure" motives to the President for his cease-fire proposal, The Post, on several occasions, saw it as a purely political move.

⁷⁶"Challenge to Hanoi," p. 12.

⁷⁷"The Cease-Fire Proposal: Triumph of Ambiguity" (Editorial), Washington Post, October 9, 1970, p. A26.

Don Oberdorfer, in a news analysis, wrote that in spite of Administration denials that the proposal was a domestic political maneuver, it would--"inevitably--have an impact on this country's national elections just twenty-seven days away." Although a peace plan is not a partisan issue, it could have partisan political consequences. Oberdorfer goes on to suggest there had been "quite a history, accident or not, of hopeful peace initiatives in our recent Octobers."⁷⁸ (Oberdorfer reported another Administration denial of political motive on October 9: if there had been such a motive, spokesmen said, the speech would have been given four days before the election so no reply from the Communists would be known.)⁷⁹ In an editorial column, Joseph Alsop said it was unlikely that Hanoi would accept the offer, that the speech had been made under "severe pre-election pressure."⁸⁰

Chalmers M. Roberts offered a particularly stinging indictment of Nixon's motives in an editorial column on October 10. He said if all worked well, the Republicans would be "thumping the peace issue right through election day." Roberts concluded that there was more "political mileage" in a public proposal than in a secret one, for Americans would not know

⁷⁸Don Oberdorfer, "Peace Plan Could Help Republicans Next Month," Washington Post, October 8, 1970, p. A1.

⁷⁹Don Oberdorfer, "Nixon Vows to Press Plan Despite Initial 'Rejections,'" Washington Post, October 9, 1970, p. A18.

⁸⁰Joseph Alsop, "This Period of Power," Washington Post, October 9, 1970, p. A27.

what was going on in private talks. Although there might have been some virtue in the cease-fire proposal, Roberts said, it was the political settlement issue that had been causing the deadlock in the peace talks.⁸¹ This is in direct contrast to The Times editorial cited earlier which saw a change in the South Vietnamese political stance in the proposal.⁸² Roberts did hold the hope that the proposal would turn out to be good statesmanship as well as good politics.

Thus we can note some real differences in the interpretative reporting by The New York Times and The Washington Post. Although the intent of the two papers was similar--to understand and explain Richard Nixon's actions relating to Vietnam during this period--their conclusions differed frequently in emphasis, content, and point of view. The implications of these differences will be explored in the final chapter.

⁸¹Chalmers M. Roberts, "Peace Bid Carries Political Benefits," Washington Post, October 10, 1970, p. A17.

⁸²"Challenge to Hanoi," p. 12.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

An examination of the coverage given to Richard Nixon's major statements on Vietnam during 1969 and 1970 by The New York Times and The Washington Post, shows there to be some similarities but more differences between the two newspapers.

The Times and The Post were alike in that they both printed the full text of each of the twelve statements (excepting the July, 1970, T.V. conversation which was excerpted) along with a front page article which summarized the major ideas in the statement. They offered about the same number of editorials and news analyses following the statements. They both tended to emphasize Nixon's time-buying motive (which as we determined in Chapter II was indeed a major part of the President's rhetorical strategy in persuading the American public to approve his plan) and the troop withdrawals (which, of course, was a major part of Nixon's Vietnamization plan). These similarities are few, however, when compared with the differences in the two newspapers' coverage.

The specific differences have been discussed in the previous three chapters. Major differences seem to appear in the area of balance of coverage. While The Washington

Post consistently printed varied opinions of others in the form of many editorial comments and reactions from Congressmen, the American military, etc., The New York Times was consistently one-sided. The Times relied on a few editorial columnists and on a limited number of Congressmen, most with a politically liberal point of view. Thus, the paper tended frequently to stress a negative evaluation of Nixon's statements.

Besides reactions of others, The Times created harmful effects concerning the President's statements by misleading headlines and by emphasizing relatively minor ideas such as the Clifford timetable and Nixon's "bums" label. The Clifford incident was the one issue which The Post also seemed to stress unduly, although it made some attempt to put the President's remarks into perspective.

The Times emphasized some statements over others by the number of articles associated with them, while The Post gave a more equal coverage across the twelve statements.

Although both newspapers discussed Nixon's motives or purpose in his actions, The Times appeared to be more critical, again stressing a negative reaction. Concerning the Cambodian operation, for example, The Times labeled it "escalation" while The Post did not; The Times assigned very personal motives, i.e., a "show of strength" while The Post did not. The Post worried only about continued aid in the form of air support to Cambodia, which did come to pass.

With the cease-fire peace proposal in October, 1970, came another major difference between the two newspapers. This time the one-sided view of The Times turned to one of support for the President. But The Post was skeptical about the proposal, calling it a political move to influence the upcoming U.S. fall elections.

Thus, The New York Times presents an interesting pattern across these two years. During Nixon's "honeymoon" period, the first few months in office, The Times remained neutral, even hopeful. As the President's plan for Vietnamization began to emerge, along with the limited troop withdrawals, the newspaper lost its sense of balance and began its negative one-sided coverage. With the cease-fire proposal, it swung the other way with one-sided positive reaction.

The Washington Post, on the other hand, shows no such pattern. Positive, negative, and neutral reaction appear consistently, resulting in a balance of coverage. At no time does the newspaper appear to be wholly for or against the President or his policy.

What can explain these differences? Why should the two perhaps most widely influential newspapers in the country, both declaring themselves to be politically independent, produce two such different products, one of which might be labeled as biased?

Perhaps this difference can best be explained by the Social Judgment-Involvement Approach developed by Sherif,

et al. This theory suggests that an individual will react to issues, people, words, etc., evaluatively depending on his own attitudes,¹ and that he will perceive a communicator and communication, consciously or subconsciously, in terms of its similarity to or difference from his own position.² And, even more significantly, a person will, depending on the intensity of his attitudes, perceive a communication to be more similar to or more discrepant from his position than it actually is.³ The New York Times is not an individual. But it is made up of individuals who do the reporting, who write the editorials, and who make the decisions as to what goes into the newspaper. And according to this analysis, The New York Times does reveal a definite attitude concerning the Vietnam War, and its treatment of President Nixon's statements about the war does reflect that attitude.

To pursue this line of analysis requires a determination of what the position of The Times actually was. When Nixon first took office, The Times remained non-committal on what the plan for peace should be. Obviously this newspaper, as was a large part of the country, was in favor of ending the U.S. involvement in the war. After all, Nixon had campaigned on a peace promise and The Times, like the rest of

¹Carolyn W. Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, Roger E. Nebergall, Attitude and Attitude Change, The Social Judgment-Involvement Approach (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1965), p. 6.

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 188.

the country, waited anxiously for the revelation of his plan to end the war. Hence, during the President's "honeymoon" period, the newspaper offered few suggestions. Only once, following the news conference of April 18, 1969, did The Times editorially suggest a unilateral withdrawal of American troops (and this seemed to be in response to rumors in Washington that such an action was to take place).⁴

It was not until the President's first major statement on Vietnam, May 14, 1969, that The Times became more explicit. In the months that followed, a number of suggestions for peace emerged.

One of the key words used over and over again by The Times was "flexibility." An editorial on May 18,⁵ named the most useful element in the President's program as "flexibility." On the other hand, James Reston complained in an editorial column on November 5, 1969, that in Nixon's November 3 address (which was quite explicit), Nixon "may well have limited his freedom of action" thus provoking the anti-war opposition.⁶ And again, on November 8, Anthony Lewis argued for a more ambiguous position from Nixon, saying a wise President should not "lock himself into one tactical

⁴Tom Wicker, "In the Nation: Symptoms of Withdrawal," New York Times, April 20, 1969, Sec. 4., p. 13.

⁵"Open Door on Vietnam" (Editorial), New York Times, May 18, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 16.

⁶James Reston, "Nixon's Mystifying Clarifications," New York Times, November 5, 1969, p. 46.

position."⁷ Later on, The Times was to approve the appointment of David K. E. Bruce as chief delegate to the Paris talks as Nixon promised him "great flexibility" in the negotiations.⁸

Probably The Times put such great stress on "flexibility" because they hoped Nixon's plan would change to agree with theirs. For example, it should be remembered that Nixon's Vietnamization plan called for a firm commitment to the Saigon government, with admission of the Communist element only by free election. This part of the plan became definite as the President revealed what Vietnamization was to entail. But, the President's ambiguity in the May 14 address left newsmen hopeful. Max Frankel, in a news analysis on May 15, wrote that the most important part of the speech lay in what Mr. Nixon "did not say." He goes on to say that the President:

Did not insist that the Thieu regime be the principal arbiter of South Vietnam's political system.
 Did not insist that the next Government of South Vietnam keep the existing Constitution.
 Did not rule out negotiations as an alternative to election to give South Vietnam "free choice."
 Did not insist American troops remain longer than North Vietnam's.
 Did not insist on a cease-fire throughout the war zone in the early stages.
 Did not insist that South Vietnam precluded political involvement of outsiders.⁹

⁷Anthony Lewis, "The Test of American Greatness in Vietnam," New York Times, November 8, 1969, p. 32.

⁸Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Appoints Bruce as Leader at Peace Talks," New York Times, July 2, 1970, p. 1; "Ambassador Bruce to Paris" (Editorial), New York Times, July 3, 1970, p. 24.

⁹Max Frankel, "What Nixon Didn't Say," New York Times, May 15, 1969, p. 17.

These points are essentially what The New York Times was to propose, and unfortunately, they were to find many of them were not in harmony with the plan Mr. Nixon was to reveal.

We might summarize the position of The Times as one of compromise. It urged negotiation with the Communists, with a political settlement that included no commitment to the Thieu regime. As the Midway meeting approached, an editorial in The Times rejoiced that Secretary of State William Rogers had stated that the United States was not "wedded" to the government in Saigon.¹⁰ It argued in November that the commitment to Saigon, now made explicit by Nixon, was inconsistent with his own Guam Doctrine.¹¹ Anthony Lewis, on November 8, equated Vietnamization (which he called Nixon's substitute for "victory"--a term repugnant to Lewis) with the preservation of the Saigon government, which Lewis labeled "corrupt and unrepresentative."¹² And, finally, the lead editorial on December 16, 1969, called the American policy a prisoner of Saigon as well as of Hanoi: Vietnamization--a commitment to the Saigon regime--was blocking negotiations.¹³

¹⁰"Meeting at Midway" (Editorial), New York Times, June 8, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 14.

¹¹"Commitment to Saigon" (Editorial), New York Times, November 7, 1969, p. 46.

¹²Lewis, "American Greatness," p. 32.

¹³"The Withdrawal Strategy" (Editorial), New York Times, December 16, 1969, p. 46.

The Times believed a more realistic policy was the inclusion of the Communists in the political settlement. An early proposal (suggested as a possible alternative--the newspaper constantly stressed unlimited options, "flexibility") was an Electoral Commission, with representatives of all the groups involved to govern the elections in South Vietnam. This would have required the resignation of the Thieu regime prior to the elections, a course Nixon would not accept. This was first mentioned in an editorial on May 14¹⁴ (prior to the President's address), and repeated on May 15,¹⁵ June 8¹⁶ (again prior to the Midway announcement), June 10,¹⁷ and September 18.¹⁸

Although The Times approved Nixon's move to withdraw American troops, the size of the reduction never seemed to be large enough. They called for "bold moves." The first announcement at Midway on June 8, 1969, was praised as a step toward disengagement, the size of the withdrawal being less important than the direction it indicated.¹⁹ But the

¹⁴"The President on Peace" (Editorial), New York Times, May 14, 1969, p. 46.

¹⁵"Mr. Nixon's Vietnam Program" (Editorial), New York Times, May 15, 1969, p. 46.

¹⁶"Meeting at Midway," p. 14.

¹⁷Hedrick Smith, "After the Midway Talks," New York Times, June 10, 1969, p. 16; "Midway Toward Peace?" (Editorial), New York Times, June 10, 1969, p. 46.

¹⁸Tom Wicker, "The Mountain and the Mouse," New York Times, September 18, 1969, p. 46.

¹⁹"Midway Toward Peace?" p. 46.

second withdrawal announcement on September 16, was regarded as a forfeited opportunity "to make a bold move toward peace."²⁰ The editorial went on to state that Nixon had apparently yielded to the generals who pursued a military victory. On September 18, in his column, Tom Wicker evaluated the withdrawal thus: "Once again the mountain has labored and brought forth its mouse."²¹

In short, The Times was always urging the President toward a more radical action than he seemed willing to take. They wanted the commitment to Thieu to be revoked, they urged Communist representation in the political determination of South Vietnam, they wanted negotiation with all options left open, they wanted troop withdrawals in numbers to indicate a marked de-escalation of American involvement. A final proposal which popped up from time to time was the offer of a cease-fire (later a "standstill" cease-fire)²² which President Nixon flatly rejected in early 1969, but proposed in his October 7, 1970, peace proposal, a point at which The New York Times and Richard Nixon finally reached some areas of agreement.

²⁰"Another Lost Opportunity" (Editorial), New York Times, September 17, 1969, p. 46.

²¹Wicker, "Mountain," p. 46.

²²See James Reston, "Nixon Makes His Stand," New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 17; "Mr. Nixon's 'Plan for Peace'" (Editorial), New York Times, November 4, 1969, p. 44; "Mr. Nixon's Vietnam Plan..." (Editorial), New York Times, October 7, 1970, p. 46; "Challenge to Hanoi" (Editorial), New York Times, October 11, 1970, Sec. 4, p. 12.

This then was the position, the attitude of The New York Times in 1969-1970 regarding Vietnam. It is certainly at the liberal end of the political spectrum. The New York Times, according to Theodore H. White, holds a unique place in American society. Its power and influence are unchallenged. White calls it "the hometown newspaper of all men of government, all men of great affairs, all men and women who try to think."²³ The values which dominate The Times are not those of "middle America," the group to which Richard Nixon so often appealed, but, instead are "the values of Manhattan, of the universities, of the opinion set, of the intellectuals."²⁴ These values, White continues, "were strongly anti-war from 1967 on, highly tolerant of radical youth and black militancy, and in polar opposition to those of the President."²⁵

A newspaper which seemingly has committed itself so totally to the liberal, intellectual point of view, apparently falls into Sherif's category of high ego-involvement. For The Times, the Vietnam issue (as were all the liberal issues) was not only a matter of strong commitment, but, according to White, a matter of "their own concept of honor and style,"²⁶ hence, strong ego-involvement. Sherif says an

²³Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1972 (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), p. 346.

²⁴Ibid., p. 348.

²⁵Ibid., p. 347.

²⁶Ibid., p. 341.

attitude can be defined as a set of evaluative categories the individual forms and which demarcate "a latitude of acceptance (the positions he finds acceptable including the most acceptable single position) and the latitude of rejection (the positions he finds objectionable in varying degree, including the most objectionable position)."²⁷ What's more, "the more involved and personally committed the individual is on the issue, the greater is the latitude of rejection in relation to the latitude of acceptance, the number of positions on which he remains non-committal approaching zero."²⁸

The Times' attitude or position concerning Vietnam was clearly defined both explicitly in articles and columns, and implicitly in reaction to the Nixon statements (Sherif says an individual's attitude is inferred from his behavior, words, and deeds).²⁹ Because of this strong position, according to the Social Judgment theory, The Times' latitude of rejection was very wide. Thus, the newspaper rejected much of what Nixon proposed. It did this frequently by emphasizing points from the statements which it considered to be important, and not necessarily those the Administration would have stressed. It emphasized, for example, only withdrawals in Vietnamization, neglecting Nixon's arguments for self-determination for South Vietnam. (Yet, The Times gave vastly more coverage to

²⁷Sherif, p. 230.

²⁸Ibid., p. 14.

²⁹Ibid., p. 19.

the Cambodian action, which it deplored, than to the withdrawals, which it approved.) The Times constantly stressed Nixon's appeals for support for the plan, rather than the plan itself. It tended to discredit Nixon and to widen the gap between him and his critics by playing on relatively minor incidents, such as the "bums" label and the Clifford timetable, and by assigning questionable personal motives to the President's actions. And, finally, The Times constantly supported these attacks on Nixon by emphasizing negative reactions--quoting most frequently the dovish Congressmen and printing almost exclusively a limited number of liberal columnists. The paper often refuted or attempted to "explain away" favorable reactions.

This one-sided coverage tended to enhance The Times' own position and tended to distort the total reality of what Nixon had said. Naturally a move such as the Cambodian operation during May, 1970, was rejected by The Times because it was seen as an escalation of the war, a complete denial of the newspaper's solution to Vietnam. But even the troop withdrawal numbers, which certainly were moving toward what The Times was advocating, fell into the newspaper's latitude of rejection. Its latitude of acceptance was so narrow, the withdrawals were perceived as discrepant from The Times' own position.

The October 7, 1970, peace proposal was assimilated into The Times' latitude of acceptance. To do this,

the newspaper had to distort the plan slightly by perceiving the statement as being closer to The Times' position than it probably actually was, reading in a flexibility the editorial staff wanted in order to reach a compromise political solution. There were occasions The Times wanted to accept a Nixon proposal, hence a request for a less definite, more ambiguous statement from the President.³⁰ In other words, they wanted him to say something he wasn't saying.

This determinedly liberal position of The Times which probably accounted for the distortion or bias in coverage, also caused the newspaper to be less responsive to Nixon's persuasive appeals. That is, as a receiver of the President's messages, it rejected arguments against American defeat, humiliation, and the "easy way" out of the war, and arguments for just peace, American pride, and self-sacrifice, in short, all the arguments aimed at middle America, apparently with success, but which were meaningless to the liberal anti-war critics. Thus if Nixon had wanted to actually convince The New York Times that Vietnamization was the best way out of the war, he would have had to appeal to a different set of values. He chose not to do this.

The Times, then, tended to react to Richard Nixon's statements on Vietnam in terms of its own position regarding the war. The Social Judgment theory says:

³⁰Reston, "Mystifying Clarifications," p. 46; Lewis, "Test of American Greatness," p. 32.

The most acceptable item serves as a standard (anchor) to which other items in that universe of discourse are compared for their proximity or divergence from it. Reaction to the items is a comparison process, whether conscious or not. And comparison between two or more items is a judgment.³¹

The Times probably considered political compromise to be the anchor position in its latitude of acceptance and any action or proposal was judged in relation to this. The bias or distortion which resulted was caused by The Times seeing Nixon's position as being more discrepant from or more similar to its own; consequently, it could see too little or too much good in what he had to say. For a newspaper to take a position about an issue is legitimate; but for that position to affect its reporting of a President's public statements is probably not legitimate.

Although The Washington Post is also considered to be liberal, it was difficult to discover a clear-cut position regarding Vietnam for this newspaper, probably because such a diversity of opinion was represented. Also, if the editorials alone were examined, the one type of article which might explicitly state the view of the newspaper as opposed to the columnists writing for the newspaper, almost no policy, other than approval of withdrawal, was advocated. Mention was made in news analyses, editorial columns, and some news articles of political settlement, coalition government, etc., but it was seldom proposed as an alternative to the Nixon policy, as was so often done in The Times. At least five

³¹Sherif, p. 7.

articles³² stressed the importance of a political settlement to the enemy and thus to negotiation and agreement. Only one³³ questioned whether the President's policy was the best way to achieve a political solution.

A possible coalition government was mentioned at least four times. An article by Chalmers M. Roberts saw a possible easing by Nixon on his previous stand against coalition following the May 14 address.³⁴ A later article by Roberts following Midway said that Nixon hadn't mentioned a coalition government.³⁵ These may indicate a preference for a coalition by Mr. Roberts, but it does not appear frequently throughout the newspaper. Two columnists, Joseph Alsop and Joseph Kraft, more openly advocated a coalition government, particularly if a settlement was to be reached.³⁶ Both these

³²Chalmers M. Roberts, "2 Plans Set Stage for Hard Bargaining," Washington Post, May 16, 1969, p. A8; Chalmers M. Roberts, "Free-Election Gamble Is Accepted by Thieu," Washington Post, June 11, 1969, pp. A1, A20; Joseph Kraft, "President Remains Hooked on Vietnamization Policy," Washington Post, April 23, 1970, p. A23; Chalmers M. Roberts, "Nixon Calls for Asia Cease-Fire," Washington Post, October 8, 1970, p. A1; Chalmers M. Roberts, "Peace Bid Carried Political Benefits," Washington Post, October 10, 1970, p. A17.

³³Roberts, "Free-Election," pp. A1, A25.

³⁴Chalmers M. Roberts, "US Eases Stand on Viet Coalition," Washington Post, May 18, 1969, pp. B1, B2.

³⁵Chalmers M. Roberts, "Questions Remain on Viet Elections," Washington Post, June 9, 1969, pp. A1, A8.

³⁶Joseph Alsop, "Further Troop Withdrawal Is Expected in Autumn," Washington Post, June 11, 1969, p. A27; Joseph Kraft, "Reaction to Midway Raises Doubt About Nixon Strategy," Washington Post, June 12, 1969, p. A21.

articles followed the Midway announcement. These four articles were representative of the extent to which The Post discussed political settlement.

The newspaper could probably have been said to take a stand in favor of withdrawal, however. This is not surprising as most public opinion advocated an end to American involvement in the Vietnam war. Like The Times, on several instances writers for The Post protested that the pace of withdrawal was too slow.³⁷ But at least three Post editorials praised the withdrawals,³⁸ and two of these made an attempt to explain, perhaps even defend, Nixon's withdrawal rate. The first, appearing after the Midway announcement, is particularly interesting:

But it is worth recalling that process [of escalation] nevertheless, now that 25,000 troops are to be withdrawn from Vietnam, because there just may be something about the nature of what has come to be called limited war, something about the need to balance domestic political pressures against the needs of the peace negotiators and the military realities, that makes it inherently difficult to move openly or decisively, whether on the way into such a war, or on the way out. It may be that we will have to run this reel backward, getting out as we

³⁷For example, see Kraft, "Reaction to Midway," p. A21; Murrey Marder, "Pace Short of Nixon's Own Hope," Washington Post, December 16, 1969, pp. A1, A9; "Vietnam: The President's Interim Report (II)" (Editorial), Washington Post, June 8, 1970, p. A22; Joseph Kraft, "Wasted Opportunity," Washington Post, October 11, 1970, p. D7.

³⁸"25,000 Troops" (Editorial), Washington Post, June 10, 1969, p. A18; "Getting Back to the High Ground," (Editorial), Washington Post, June 19, 1969, p. A26; "Vietnam: 'A Winning Position'?" (Editorial), Washington Post, December 17, 1969, p. A24.

got in, by stealth, in which case the removal of 25,000 troops, however disappointing the numbers, takes on a particular significance.³⁹

The editorial concludes in reply to George McGovern who had complained the numbers were not enough to imply "a fundamental change in our policy" that neither had been the introduction of 35,000 troops in March, 1965--but the process had begun then, too.

The second editorial states the withdrawal should be irreversible and accelerating, but one whose pace and termination date "are at least somewhat related to honest judgments about the performance of the South Vietnamese and the response of the enemy." Because of the sacrifices already made and the nature of the "quagmire," the United States had "an obligation to take care about the way we hand it back to them as we try to make our own way back to the high ground."⁴⁰

The nature of these two editorials reveals a great deal about the attitude (or position) of The Washington Post toward President Nixon and Vietnam. The newspaper seemed to be more concerned with analysis and less with advocacy--which may account for the lack of a clear position concerning the war and for more objective coverage of the President's statements.

Occasionally, The Post took a "wait-and-see" attitude. Even if the writer was not particularly happy about a Nixon

³⁹"25,000 Troops," p. A18.

⁴⁰"A Winning Position?" p. A24.

action, he might reserve judgment. This occurred, for example, after Cambodia.⁴¹ On at least three occasions after the Vietnamization plan began to emerge, articles stated that time would show what the success would be. Very early, an article by George C. Wilson declared the next several months would tell whether the President and his advisers were reading the situation correctly in allowing the South Vietnamese to take over responsibility for some fronts.⁴² An article by Chalmers M. Roberts and an editorial column by Joseph Kraft both declared only time would assess the value of the first withdrawals in reaching any kind of real settlement.⁴³

While The New York Times often chose to interpret the President's policy or intentions, The Washington Post occasionally would request that the ambiguities be made clear. For example, in an editorial column preceding the November 3 address, Chalmers M. Roberts indicated that Mr. Nixon needed to "explain the rationale underlying his policy and . . . to indicate by some sort of timetable how long it will take to extricate the United States from the conflict." He complained that the President had done badly so far in articulating what

⁴¹For example, see "Vietnam: The President's Interim Report (I)" (Editorial), Washington Post, June 5, 1970, p. A22; "Cambodia: The President's Report" (Editorial), Washington Post, July 1, 1970, p. A18.

⁴²George C. Wilson, "Vietnamese Army Faces a Sink-or-Swim Situation," Washington Post, May 15, 1969, p. A6.

⁴³Roberts, "Questions Remain," pp. A1, A18; Joseph Kraft, "Gimmick Solutions Cast Aside as Nixon Relies on Negotiations," Washington Post, May 15, 1969, p. A19.

he was trying to do. Omissions and obscure passages in the May 14 address had left open possibilities for compromise with the Communists.⁴⁴

It will be remembered from Chapter II that President Nixon frequently used the term "just peace" to define his goal in Vietnam. An editorial in April of 1970, took issue with this by demanding that Nixon be "prepared to define the mission and state its purpose in terms of something more realistic and less platitudinous than the achievement of 'a just peace' for a part of the world which has known little else than turmoil and conflict for centuries."⁴⁵ An editorial in June, 1970, asks Nixon to make clear the purpose of the Cambodian operation.⁴⁶

And, finally, an editorial responding to the October 7 peace proposal was titled: "The Cease-Fire Proposal: Triumph of Ambiguity." The writer said the significance of the plan depended on how one defined "cease-fire." It could be interpreted several ways and thus the speech was a "masterful performance" politically. But its value in achieving peace

⁴⁴Chalmers M. Roberts, "The President's Speech: Chance to Address Home Front on Vietnam Contains Both Opportunity and Peril," Washington Post, November 2, 1969, p. B7.

⁴⁵"Vietnam: A Fresh Note and a Tired Refrain" (Editorial), Washington Post, April 22, 1970, p. A18.

⁴⁶"Cambodia: A Broken Icon--or a Parting Shot?" (Editorial), Washington Post, June 3, 1970, p. A14.

would be unknown until the President removed the "crucial ambiguity."⁴⁷

Richard Nixon deliberately used ambiguity to attempt to win support from the people. It seems more responsible for The Post to ask for clarification of that ambiguity than for The Times to assume an understanding (which was so often consistent with their own point of view). The Times, as has been noted, even went so far as to ask for greater ambiguity so Nixon could be interpreted better to The Times' satisfaction.⁴⁸

Thus we may conclude that The Washington Post did not hold as intense an attitude toward Vietnam and therefore did not perceive Nixon's statements in the same way as The Times. Or at least The Post may have more determinedly pursued a course of balanced reporting. According to the Social Judgment-Involvement approach, The Post's more moderate or undetermined position, at least in the area of Vietnam, increased its latitude of noncommitment, thus accounting for its lack of acceptance or rejection of the Nixon statements, its examination of both sides, its analytical quality. The newspaper did always seem to assume Nixon was on the way out of the war, which may have been the anchor in The Post's

⁴⁷"The Cease-Fire Proposal: Triumph of Ambiguity" (Editorial), Washington Post, October 9, 1970, p. A26.

⁴⁸Reston, "Mystifying Clarifications," p. 46; Lewis, "Test of American Greatness," p. 32.

latitude of acceptance. That position is far less extreme than The Times', resulting in a narrower latitude of rejection in The Post.⁴⁹ This then may account for the less biased treatment by The Post than by The New York Times of the Nixon statements.

An interesting sidelight perhaps should be noted here. Richard Nixon has had an antagonistic relationship with the press from the time he first entered politics. Time acknowledges, "there has been little affection or even rapport between Nixon and most of the journalists who have covered him throughout his career."⁵⁰ Jeb Stuart Magruder, former Special Assistant to President Nixon, states it even more strongly. He calls Nixon "a politician who was absolutely paranoid about criticism, who took it all personally, and whose instinct was to lash back at his critics in ways that usually did more harm than good."⁵¹ According to Magruder, it was basic to Nixon's personality to see himself surrounded by liberal enemies and to get them before they got him.⁵² These liberal enemies included the media, which was frequently under attack by the Administration.

⁴⁹Sherif, p. 59.

⁵⁰"Covering Watergate: Success and Backlash," Time, 104 (July 8, 1974), p. 71.

⁵¹Jeb Stuart Magruder, An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 77.

⁵²Ibid., p. 86.

Theodore H. White, among others, states that a large number of newspapers, perhaps a majority across the nation, have been good to Richard Nixon. Yet there was a specific cluster of newspapers which the Administration lumped together under the convenient rubric "Eastern Liberal Press," that Nixon categorized in his "enemies list." This group of papers included large-circulation publications across the nation, but was headed by The New York Times and The Washington Post.⁵³ White, Magruder, Keogh, and Agnew, among others, have declared that these two publications also headed the Nixon Administration list of hostile and offending newspapers. Yet according to this study of the coverage of these two papers, The Washington Post, at least insofar as Vietnam during 1969-1970, was concerned, gave Richard Nixon a generally fair and balanced coverage. The President was apparently unable to see this and lumped The Post with The New York Times which was much more biased in its treatment. Granted, The Post was not an outright advocate of Nixon's policy which the President would undoubtedly have preferred, but neither was it an outright adversary, or as Nixon saw it, an "enemy."

This attitude of Richard Nixon toward the Liberal Press can also be explained by the Social Judgment-Involvement approach. The President's extreme position regarding the media, his seemingly paranoia about criticism, the "enemies" mentality of the Administration regarding the press, created

⁵³White, p. 339.

an extremely wide latitude of rejection. Thus, nearly anything said by the Liberal Press, i.e., The Times and The Post, was perceived as negative criticism. The President therefore was unable to see the distinctively fairer treatment of The Post regarding Vietnam. In fact, according to White, by the 1972 election, The Washington Post was first on the White House hate-list.⁵⁴

This distortion of reality, this perception that saw The Post position as more discrepant from Nixon's than it was, all of which was representative of the "enemies" mentality of the White House, led to attacks on the press by Administration officials, to still greater hostility between the President and the media possibly resulting in less objectivity in press coverage, and, according to Magruder, eventually even to Watergate.⁵⁵ The President became unresponsive and insensitive to news comment. And although at the beginning of his Administration, Nixon promised frequent news conferences, they diminished each year until nearly all direct contact with reporters was cut off. Thus a relationship which could be potentially helpful to both media and Administration (and ultimately to the public), deteriorated to mutual distrust and antagonism.

Just what is the responsibility of a newspaper in relationship to a President and his message? U.S. News and World Report said at one point: "It's not the function of

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 342.

⁵⁵Magruder, p. 317.

the reporting media to be servants of any government, nor of the political opposition either. Its function is to inform. The President's job is to inform them."⁵⁶ But Nation, on the other hand, opined: "The Press is not a mere conveyor belt by which information is passed along. Part of its role-- a major part--is to scrutinize what the President says and does. It is up to the press to point out omissions, inaccuracies, half-truths and misleading statements."⁵⁷

The press has a great advantage in that it has access to all kinds of information that the public could never learn on its own. The public needs that information. As Curtis MacDougall points out in his book, Interpretative Reporting, "In a democracy it is essential that everyone have access to as many facts as possible so that he can form proper judgments and influence public affairs."⁵⁸ He goes on to say that the press can help in the stimulation of "interest and participation on the part of the citizenry in governmental affairs."⁵⁹ He continues:

Journalism's first obligation is to report fully the activities of public agencies and officials. Since all public issues ultimately are decided by public opinion,

⁵⁶"Nixon and the Press," U.S. News & World Report 69 (December 28, 1970), p. 12.

⁵⁷"Mr. Nixon and the Press," Nation, 211 (December 28, 1970), pp. 675-676.

⁵⁸Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 197.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 372.

the duty includes presentation of the pros and cons of all important matters and expert analysis of them. In other words, interpretative reporting and writing are essential in the field of governmental affairs.⁶⁰

It would seem then that the press has a responsibility to explain and interpret, to provide the public with as much insight as possible, as long as it does so in an objective way. Even the journalist's role as critic, as protector of the public interest, should be treated responsibly, objectively.

James Keogh, in his book Nixon and the Press, complains that the press creates the impression that answers are obvious and decisions could be clear-cut. In reality, Keogh says, the President's decisions had to be weighed with the greatest care. Choices were

very close--often the plus and minus factors surrounding alternative courses of action came almost to a balance. Solutions were never ideal; nearly every one carried with it effects which the decision makers did not like but had to accept as the least of the negatives. Too often, the broad brush of the major media failed to give the public the proper perspective on this fundamental complexity of the democratic process.⁶¹

Indeed, the decisions made by President Nixon concerning the solution to Vietnam, a solution which had eluded his predecessors, could not have been easy. And at times, The New York Times at least did urge what seemed to be simplistic solutions: get U.S. troops out quickly, compromise with the

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹James Keogh, President Nixon and the Press (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1972), p. 14.

Communists, abandon the Thieu government, etc. The newspaper would have presented a more realistic picture of the situation if it had stressed the complexity of the decision.

Lyndon Johnson, former President of the United States, gave some insight into what it is like for a President to make difficult and unpopular decisions when he said following the Cambodian action: "I hope our President's voice is not drowned out by those other voices which are without knowledge and the responsibility to make this agonizing decision. . . . God knows Presidents need it [support]. I know because I have been there."⁶²

The newspapers both made some attempt to discuss directly the complexities of the situation. James Reston of The Times, said in an editorial column following a rather negative assessment of the November 3 address: Even so the President was acting for peace with the withdrawals; "this is his way of dealing with what is obviously a very complicated and dangerous situation."⁶³

And a particularly significant editorial appeared in The Washington Post in September, 1969. After discussing a plan by Senator Charles Goodell requiring troops to be withdrawn by December 1, 1970, the article examined consequences of such an action. It concluded:

⁶²Larry Weintraub, "Johnson Asks Americans to Support Nixon's Move," Washington Post, May 2, 1970, p. A6.

⁶³James Reston, "Washington: What Is the President Up To?" New York Times, November 9, 1969, Sec. 4, p. 14.

Someone once remarked that the United States will get out of Vietnam the way it got in, by a progression of small steps, so that one day we would wake and there would be no more war. But it won't happen that way. Genuine tragedies never do. Letting go in Vietnam is going to be no simple or honorable matter. The choices will get harder not easier, and no cause is served now by muffling the extremely serious consequences of proposals to disengage. The only thing harder to do than winning this war is losing it gracefully, and the critics had best come to terms with that, too.⁶⁴

Of course, any time an article fully discussed the pros and cons of an idea, it, in a sense, was showing the complexity of the idea. This happened occasionally in the two papers, more frequently in The Post.⁶⁵ Even when both sides were presented in separate articles, the discussion was more realistic. However, the one-sided reporting of The Times definitely created a simplistic assessment of the situation.

The United States public is fortunate to have a press which sets for itself the goal of truth, which does not allow itself to be the tool of any political faction. We are fortunate too to enjoy the system of interpretative reporting which can provide an accurate, complete and insightful news dissemination. Interpretative reporting, however, does not free the newsman or the newspaper from responsibility for objectivity. MacDougall says articles unmistakably devoted to advocacy or characterized by a signature authorizing the

⁶⁴"Letting Go in Vietnam" (Editorial), Washington Post, September 28, 1969, p. B6.

⁶⁵For example, see "The President and the War" (Editorial), Washington Post, May 16, 1969, p. A24; Max Frankel, "Nixon's Compromise," New York Times, April 21, 1970, p. 2; James Reston, "The Valor of Ignorance," New York Times, October 9, 1970, p. 37.

writer's own conclusions and interpretations are not necessarily free from opinion or bias.⁶⁶ However, virtually every major article used in this analysis carried a by-line. Frank Luther Mott in The News In America, says there is a general feeling that a by-line allows the writer to express an opinion much the way a columnist does.⁶⁷ But he warns:

If the article purports to be a news story, it should be as "objective" and undistorted as possible; and comment and "advocacy" should be shown frankly for what they are. Interpretative reporting, if allowed to become a cloak for propaganda, would take us back to the bad old days of unrestricted "qualified report."⁶⁸

A great deal of skepticism has arisen in recent times about the press. Richard Nixon as President tried to by-pass the interpretative and hence rhetorical screen of the press, by speaking directly to the public via television and radio. Nevertheless, a great portion of the population relies on what is said about an event--perhaps looking for the insight the knowledgeable reporter can give. It is doubtful that a majority of the public looks upon a reputable newspaper, especially one like The New York Times, as advocate rather than as carrier of news. Yet a reading of The Times alone concerning President Richard Nixon and Vietnam would quite possibly lead to a biased point of view.

⁶⁶MacDougall, p. 30.

⁶⁷Frank Luther Mott, The News In America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 83.

⁶⁸Ibid.

The Social Judgment theory would say a message must be distorted somewhat by the receiver if an attitude already exists concerning that message. The newspaper, however, has a special responsibility to compensate for that distortion with an effort at objective, balanced coverage. As they reported Richard Nixon's major statements on Vietnam during 1969-1970, The Washington Post made this attempt. The New York Times--unfortunately--apparently did not.

APPENDIX I

Major Statements by Richard Nixon Concerning Vietnam, 1969-1970, with Dates Presented

1. Inaugural Address January 20, 1969
2. The President's News Conference January 27, 1969
3. The President's News Conference March 4, 1969
4. The President's News Conference March 14, 1969
5. The President's News Conference April 18, 1969
6. Address to the Nation on Vietnam May 14, 1969
7. Remarks Following Initial Meeting
with President Thieu at Midway
Island June 8, 1969
8. The President's News Conference June 19, 1969
9. Remarks Following a Meeting with
President Thieu in Saigon July 30, 1969
- Remarks to American Troops of the
1st Infantry Division in Vietnam July 30, 1969
10. Statement of United States
Troops in Vietnam September 16, 1969
11. Address Before the 24th Session
of the General Assembly of the
United States September 18, 1969
12. The President's News Conference September 26, 1969
13. Address to the Nation of the War
in Vietnam November 3, 1969
14. Remarks in the Chamber of the
United States House of
Representatives November 13, 1969
- Remarks in the Chamber of the
United States Senate November 13, 1969

15. Address to the Nation on Progress
Toward Peace in Vietnam December 15, 1969
16. Remarks Concerning the State of
the World Message February 18, 1970
17. Address to the Nation: Report
on Vietnam April 20, 1970
18. Address to the Nation: The Situa-
tion in Southeast Asia April 30, 1970
19. The President's News Conference May 8, 1970
20. Interim Report to the Nation:
The Cambodian Sanctuary Operation June 3, 1970
21. Report to the Nation:
The Cambodian Operation June 30, 1970
22. "A Conversation with the President
on Foreign Policy;" The President's
Television Interview with Howard K.
Smith of ABC, Eric Sevareid of CBS,
and John Chancellor of NBC July 1, 1970
23. Address to the Nation: The New
Initiative for Peace in South-
east Asia October 7, 1970

APPENDIX II

Major Statements Used in Analysis of Newspaper Coverage

1. Address to the Nation on Vietnam May 14, 1969
2. Remarks Following Initial Meeting with President Thieu at Midway Island June 8, 1969
3. The President's News Conference June 19, 1969
4. The President's News Conference September 26, 1969
5. Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam November 3, 1969
6. Address to the Nation on Progress Toward Peace in Vietnam December 15, 1969
7. Address to the Nation: Report on Vietnam April 20, 1970
8. Address to the Nation: The Situation in Southeast Asia April 30, 1970
9. Interim Report to the Nation: The Cambodian Sanctuary Operation June 3, 1970
10. Report to the Nation: The Cambodian Operation June 30, 1970
11. Television Interview: "A Conversation with the President on Foreign Policy" July 1, 1970
12. Address to the Nation: The New Initiative for Peace in Southeast Asia October 7, 1970

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