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Propaganda and the Presidency:

An Analysis of Lyndon B. Johnson's Media Relations, 1963-1968.

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Contents

Introduction and Research Methodology

i. Aims

This thesis investigates the presidency of Lyndon Johnson with specific reference to his foreign and domestic policies, dominated by the Vietnam War and the Great Society. As the leader of the country following the assassination of his predecessor John F. Kennedy, Johnson introduced a series of measures in both foreign and domestic policy that would affect the United States for decades to come both for better and for worse. After high points in the immediate aftermath of his succession in November 1963 and his own election a year later, Johnson saw his credibility eroded as criticism mounted and his approval ratings slid. Most scholars have attributed this decline to the ongoing Vietnam War and a lack of government transparency when discussing the matter with the public. This work considers whether the following question has merit:

Was Lyndon B Johnson's credibility as the President of the United States undermined by his inability to develop a strategy to successfully put forward his domestic and foreign policies to the satisfaction of the American public and by his administration's use of a reactive, rather than a proactive, press strategy?

For the purposes of this work a "proactive" strategy is envisaged as a coherent, well thought-out approach to press and public relations that takes into account previous statements and promises and plans for future events and issues. A "reactive" strategy is one that fails to take into account long-term factors, and only reacts to major news stories in the short-term with little or no real thought given to the lasting effects of recent or current dealings with the press and public.

To arrive at a conclusion the Johnson administration's collection of public opinion data has been thoroughly researched, and the attempts made to use this data to reverse the ongoing slump

in Presidential approval ratings after 1965.[1] Central parts of this research were undertaken during a four-week visit to the LBJ Presidential Library, located at the University of Texas in Austin. The LBJ Library contains a multitude of documents pertaining to the president and his public image, as well as to detailed work carried out by aides and staff members on public image and opinion.

America in the 1960s has a rich historiography, in which the presidency and the changing fortunes of the occupant of the Oval Office is often central. In order to gain the fullest possible understanding of the time period and contemporary arguments surrounding Johnson's time in office, it has been necessary to consult wide-ranging and varied secondary material. Disciplines other than history have contributed, therefore for example, reviewing the work of political scientists on public opinion and propaganda – topics at the crux of this thesis – has been important. This has helped to develop a theoretical understanding of propaganda and its uses by the Johnson administration, and strongly informs the literature review of this thesis.

However, this rich historiography raises another problem with the study of the Johnsonian era in American politics; with such a huge amount of historiographical material to view it is simply impossible for a single historian to sift through every grain of information and opinion for a study of this scope. With that in mind, it has been important to carefully select the key information required for the thesis, and decide which aspects of the historiographical material are most useful. The examples of the Great Society and Vietnam allow a substantial focus on both the president's foreign and domestic policies.

Multitudes of sources have been used. Public opinion polls taken by government-accredited sources such as Oliver Quayle and John Kraft, are as important as evidence of how the Johnson administration collected public opinion as they are as insights into the views of the public on the

[1] Johnson and his administration were acutely aware of the decline in the latter years of his time in office; his polling adviser, Frederick Panzer, kept charts showing the president's approval rating dropping from a high of almost 80% after being sworn in to just 44% on two occasions during Bill Moyers's time as press secretary in 1966. See Memorandum from Frederick Panzer to the President, 21 February 1967, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, box 402, Lyndon B Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, for more details.

president. Newspaper sources such as the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* have been consulted. As national press, they help to gauge the mood of the country and offer valuable insights into public debate and opinion on social matters. Several other regional and local newspapers carried syndicated opinion polls such as those conducted by George Gallup. These polls did not always agree with those conducted officially and so it has been important to examine these.

Opinion polls, while useful for gauging the general mood of the populace, are limited by the size and proportion of their sample. A good pollster such as Gallup or Louis Harris uses an indicative sample of the population of the country but this is not a foolproof method of predicting or summing up the mood of such a diverse nation as the United States. This is perhaps best summed up in the case of George Gallup by the Dewey vs. Truman presidential election of 1948 in which a landslide victory for Dewey was predicted by Gallup and other major pollsters of the era. When Truman won, public confidence in the opinion polling system was knocked. For his part, Gallup blamed his failure to predict the result on having ended his opinion polling prematurely, something confirmed by his son George, Jr., in a later interview with the *Los Angeles Times*.[2] Much more recently in the United Kingdom, opinion polls for the 2015 UK parliamentary election largely predicted a hung parliament between the Labour and Conservative parties, when in fact the Conservatives won a clear majority, and the opposite occurred in 2017.[3] Clearly then, opinion polls should not be taken as an absolute marker of public opinion at any given time, and an event of any significance can change how a public figure in the mould of Lyndon B Johnson is viewed. Thus, it is important to take opinion polls as only one marker of the general mood, in conjunction with other available and appropriate sources. Newspaper and magazine articles in publications with high circulations tended to reflect and reinforce the views of their readers. Official sources detailing the research of government agencies into public opinion on specific matters are also valuable.

[2] W Lester, "'Dewey Defeats Truman' Disaster Haunts Pollsters," *Los Angeles Times,* 1 November 1998, accessed on 15 September 2017 at http://articles.latimes.com/1998/nov/01/news/mn-38174.

[3] The 2015 result led to the YouGov polling agency publishing several documents online relating to their failure to accurately predict the result of the election; e.g., P Keller, "We Got It Wrong. Why?," *YouGov*, 11 May 2015, https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/05/11/we-got-it-wrong-why/ accessed on 3 January 2017.

With that in mind, several official sources from the Johnson Library have been crucial to this piece. Records kept by Frederick Panzer – a Johnson aide who was tasked with collating important media reports and issues, as well as compiling reports to the president on this subject – have been extremely helpful to the examination of the impact of media relations on Johnson's credibility. Preparatory material on the president's speeches and media engagements located in the Library's speech and background material files have also been invaluable. Harry Middleton, the director of the Johnson Library for twenty-five years and a former speechwriter for the president, also made himself available for interview.

This primary source material will form the basis of the chronological chapters of this thesis. The continually changing nature of Johnsonian press strategy can be most effectively demonstrated through a sequential examination of key events in Johnson's presidency, an analysis of how these events pertain to presidential-press relations and a discussion of their effects on the administration's on-going attempts to court the press and public. Ultimately, this chronological view will span five chapters from 1963-1968, and conclude with a thorough analysis of the findings.

The available primary source material only tells part of the story, so far as this thesis is concerned. The other focus of this thesis is on the print media, with particular reference to sources such as the *New York Times* and *TIME Magazine*. Where it has been possible, a wide variety of sources from other areas such as news broadcasts, other major newspapers like the *Washington Post* and some regional newspapers have been used. Johnson's press secretary during his final year in office asserted that, "The press is the editorial policies of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, both potent voices on the Potomac."[4] This certainly appears to have been true of this era, and the weight that the administration placed on the opinions expressed by these two institutions has undoubtedly influenced this work. Key polling data collected by Louis Harris is not freely available to access before the year 1970 and consequently polling data from Gallup is used more heavily –

[4] G Christian, *The President Steps Down: A Personal Memoir of the Transfer of Power* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), p. 186.

although Harris's memoirs do have some information on the Johnson years that was relevant to this work. It is worth noting that Harris polls tended to give the president slightly harsher results than polls by Gallup, and therefore the generally friendlier poll results are more prevalent in this work. Archival material from the Johnson Library has been used in conjunction with documents obtained from the published *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, but the vast amount of information available from both sources has meant that careful selection has been made from the sources most relevant to the topic.[5]

It is also important to recognise the parameters of this work from the point of view of the historical argument being raised. The thesis looks at presidential press relations from the perspective of Vietnam and the Great Society. As the Great Society ran into difficulty and the focus of the administration shifted to Vietnam, the conflict will become more prevalent in the analysis. Only key events and engagements with the press during Johnson's tenure are discussed as it would not be possible to include every disagreement between the administration and the media, as this would widen the scope of the work too far. The nature of the work also requires a strong contextual base – it was concluded that the best way to make this easier for the reader was to include a section at the beginning of each chronological chapter, summarising major political events of the year that the administration contended with.

Political historian Vaughn Bornet once said of Johnson, "He dared, cared, and shared of himself, and thereby very often carried the day." He claimed that a leader of Johnson's ilk is unlikely to step foot in the White House again.[6] On the other hand, authors such as Robert Caro – one of the pre-eminent scholars of Johnson's life before the presidency do not think so well of him.[7] It is not the intention of this work to develop original arguments or further the discussion regarding Lyndon

[5] The Foreign Relations series can be found online. For further information, see *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], 1964-1968, vols. I-XXXIV. The focus of this thesis is on vols. I-VII, which look specifically at documents pertaining to Vietnam, although in places other volumes have been referenced for the record.
[6] V D Bornet, "Reappraising the Presidency of Lyndon B Johnson," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 1990), p. 601.
[7] See, for example, R Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, Volume 1: The Path To Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

B. Johnson's character, although his presidential style and personality clearly contributed to his press strategy, which is the ultimate focus of this work. As such, the four-volume biography of Johnson by Caro is used sparingly – there is, as yet, no volume of his biography that deals with the elected presidency of Johnson. On the other hand, the actions of presidential aides such as the press secretaries, Pierre Salinger, George Reedy, Bill Moyers and George Christian will be examined. Key figures such as presidential aides Joe Califano and Jack Valenti, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and his eventual replacement Clark Clifford, Vietnam advisors McGeorge Bundy and his brother William, Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, Under Secretary of State George Ball and others will also be the subject of discussion during this work. Ultimately however, the actions and declarations of President Johnson are the most important and will form the focus of the discussion.

This thesis seeks to offer a deeper understanding of an aspect of the modern presidency. Johnson was one of the first presidents to be heavily involved with media relations, employing experienced press secretaries throughout his time in office. His presidency came during a period of intense economic and cultural change in American society, and the media was not exempt from this. New media techniques and the rise of televised news reports were at the forefront of the changing face of the media and it was necessary for the White House to adapt to suit this. Johnson's time in office can perhaps be seen as a prototype of the modern presidency – an institution that actively seeks information about the public to maintain a strong image and exert political influence.

An in-depth view of Johnson's presidency and an examination of how he lost credibility with the American people – if indeed this was the case – will provide insights about the margins for success and failure in the modern White House, how the presidency seeks to operate and how this can evolve over time. It should increase our understanding of the role of the president, the role of propaganda in the presidency and the potential direction of the relationship between the commander-in-chief and his people.

ii. Methodology

This section describes the way in which data has been collected and applied to the research question, and explains why the information gathered will help the formulation of conclusions concerning Lyndon Johnson and his administration's media strategy. It will expand on the interpretative analysis of the subject and the selection of a chronological, rather than a thematic, structure and consider potential complications that arose during the research process.

A purely empirical analysis of "the facts" would have been difficult, given the nature of both Lyndon B Johnson as a person and the sources available. Unlike some presidents, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose editorial markings are very evident on surviving drafts of speeches and transcripts of press conferences, Lyndon Johnson's imprint on such materials in the LBJ Archives is small. Much of his contact with aides and staff members was completed verbally and, as such, no definitive record of his own public opinion strategy exists to be analysed. Accordingly, the decision was made to implement a more qualitative analysis of Johnson's presidency, from which Johnson's intentions and ideas can be inferred.

The way in which this analysis approaches the problem is simple. The thesis proposes that Lyndon Johnson was unable to form a proactive and forward thinking strategy with which to task his advisers in dealing with the press. This directly affected his credibility, and therefore his ability to effectively govern the country. This argument is sustained through a close examination of the changing attitudes towards press relations that emerged from the government, in conjunction with the actual reporting of the press and public opinion polls. This allows conclusions to be drawn as to whether Johnson's inability to be proactive damaged his credibility, and, indeed, whether he did act in a reactive manner for most of his presidency.

Archival and printed official documentation was consulted at the Lyndon B Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the Eccles Centre of the British Library in London. The archival component of this research has revolved around the collecting of

documentation that shows how the Johnson administration viewed and reacted to the media. Oral histories collected by the library have been used, particularly those that deal with media personalities of the time, such as Peter Braestrup, as well as telephone conversations that the Library has made available to researchers in the archives and, latterly, online. The work of Michael Beschloss in transcribing hundreds of telephone conversations from Johnson's accession to the presidency through to 1965 have also been important to earlier chapters.[8] Johnson secretly recorded hundreds if not thousands of conversations during his time in office – Beschloss notes that he was extremely careful who he kept informed about these recordings.[9] It is important to note though, that Beschloss' work only transcribes a small proportion of the available telephone recordings from the Johnson presidency, and only throughout the first two years of his presidency. As such, care has been taken to ensure that Beschloss' work, useful though it is, has not been relied upon for primary source evidence.[10] Archival research has also involved collecting some of the opinion polls commissioned by Johnson through private pollsters such as Oliver Quayle. Finally, examples of the speechwriting process have been collected to provide documentary evidence of the factors that affected the process of communicating with the public. The *Foreign Relations of the United States* series has an extensive collection of documents pertaining to the Vietnam War and foreign policy objectives that take into account media strategy. The most pertinent documents have been cited in this work. It was also possible to conduct a face-to-face interview with former speechwriter Harry Middleton, but other attempts to contact surviving staff members have been unsuccessful.

[8] Beschloss has thus far compiled two volumes of this material, collected in *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes 1963-1964*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) and *Reaching For Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes 1965-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).
[9] M R Beschloss, "Knowing What Really Happened," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4 (December 2002), p. 644.
[10] T Sullivan et al. note that on, for example, 5 August 1964, Beschloss only transcribed two out of 27 conversations. This clearly does not provide the full story of what the president did that day, but can provide interesting analysis when combined with other source analysis from the time. For full details of the article's study into Johnson's telephone conversation, see Sullivan, "Presidential Recordings as Presidential Data: Assessing LBJ's Presidential Persuasive Attempts," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 941-42.

The second way in which data has been collected is through third party contemporary sources. These include, but are not limited to, the archives of the *New York Times* newspaper, *TIME Magazine*'s archives and material from other major sources of contemporary news in the 1960s that discuss the president where they have become available. The *Department of State Bulletin* is less relevant in most areas, but has still proven useful. The records of Congressional hearings have been published and are available to view online in some cases – these have been useful in looking at the 1966 hearings on the war, for example.[11] Third party syndicated poll data has been collected at great length. The Gallup organisation has published an almanac of polls that ran in syndicated newspapers and the third volume of this work has proven especially significant, as it contains a wealth of poll information that relates to Johnson's popularity, job rating and the war in Vietnam under his stewardship. Other major poll data such as the Harris Poll has been more difficult to come across, as their records do not stretch further back than 1970, but there have been opportunities to view a limited amount of this data.

Other, less official, contemporary primary material has been published and numerous witnesses and participants have published their own accounts. Many of Johnson's aides and staff members have released memoirs, including former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, top domestic policy aide Joseph Califano, presidential aide and future head of the Motion Picture Association of America Jack Valenti, press secretaries George Reedy and George Christian, former commander of American forces in Vietnam (MACV) General William Westmoreland and numerous others.

The final way in which data has been collected has been through secondary material, much which was consulted in the British Library and the Library of Congress. Biographies of Johnson, such as those by Robert Caro, Robert Dallek, Kathleen Turner, Randall Woods and others, have been

[11] Specifically, the 1966 hearings can be found at: *Supplemental Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Year, 1966: Vietnam: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eighty-ninth Congress, second session, on S. 2793, to amend further the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended: 28 January, 4, 8, 10, 17 and 18 February, 1966*. As accessed on 4 February 2017 at catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/010309694.

invaluable in the additional information they have supplied. These will be discussed in much greater detail in the review of literature that follows this section. A range of theoretical work on propaganda has also been collected. It is recognised here that the extent to which Johnson's actions can be categorised as propaganda is open to debate; nevertheless, it is argued that the term is appropriate and therefore the extent to which his attempts to propagandise major policies succeeded is a key aspect of this thesis. It is also inherent to any discussion of public opinion.

Information collected from primary sources was analysed in terms of its potential impact on the media relations of the Johnson government. To this end, private meetings between high-ranking members of the administration such as advisors, aides, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and senior advisors to the president, and with Lyndon Johnson himself have been used as evidence to further the argument that the government followed a reactive strategy towards dealing with public affairs and the media. Newspaper headlines and articles by influential members of the press, such as James "Scotty" Reston, Stanley Karnow, Walter Lippmann and others, have been used to a great extent in this work to evidence journalistic opinion on the policies of the administration. The thesis proposes that Johnson was severely affected by public criticism of his actions, so it is important to the argument to show examples of this. As well as this, the speechwriting and behind the scenes evidence-gathering processes for several major addresses, particularly the president's annual State of the Union message to Congress, have been of great value to this work. They complement the chronological nature of the piece, and give a sense of the year-on-year progression of attitudes towards media contact within the administration, as well as showing how those who were in charge of the process approached the preparation of propaganda.

As indicated above, the evidence and collected data has been arranged in a chronological fashion, to avoid duplication of the material. Intertwined themes emerge in the separate chronological chapters, rather than in a disjointed thematic structure. One of the key aspects of the administration was the changing performance over time (and the political cycle) of Johnson and his

central public affairs advisors. By showing the different successive strategies and approaches taken by the president to curry public and press favour, it is possible to see whether he learned from his mistakes and whether the administration was able to create an effective approach to the publicising and propagandising of his domestic and foreign policies. In turn, this can show whether an inability or difficulty in dealing with the press undermined Johnson's credibility and led to the creation of what newspapers termed a, "Credibility Gap," in the later years of Johnson's presidency.[12]

It was imperative to take into account potential qualitative issues that the data raised, including difficulties in using and interpreting poll data as a guide for the popularity of the subject. A section of the literature review deals at some length with the advantages and disadvantages of opinion polls, and considers theoretical aspects of the debate. This thesis treats opinion polling as a non-definitive mark of popularity. Due to the ever changing and difficult-to-ascertain nature of public opinion, poll data is used in the context of how it was construed by Johnson, and the effects that this may have had on his actions. Analysis of the changing nature of Johnson's relationship with pollsters and poll data will play an important part in the conclusions concerning the administration's inability to cultivate a proactive strategy towards public interaction. This pertains to both Johnson's commissioned polls, and those carried out by the likes of Gallup and Harris.

This work has been undertaken within certain defined limits. As noted above, it is the intention to provide a critical analysis of Johnson's media relations and his public standing over the course of his elected presidency, specifically the period between his election in November 1964 and his withdrawal from the primary election process in March 1968. The escalation of the Vietnam War and the pursuit of Great Society policies are central. This thesis builds on existing literature, but it is not the intention to pass judgement on Johnson's capacity as a policymaker, generally, or to judge his character or integrity as a politician, as others have done extensively. Rather, this thesis makes its original and specific contribution to knowledge in its review of Johnson's abilities as a propagandist,

[12] On the credibility gap, see Chapter 4, where the evolution of the term is discussed in more detail.

offering insights into the Johnson presidency and its decline in popularity, showing the mistakes that were made as they happened, and reviewing whether or not these were avoidable errors. The conclusion is that the Johnson administration ultimately failed to take advantage of the media to effectively propagandise its policies. It is not argued that Johnson consistently and consciously tried to dupe the people into supporting his policies; rather, he simply could not effectively demonstrate and communicate them to the public, due to a fundamental misunderstanding of how the media operated. This failure to offer a proactive and consistent stance on important matters ultimately played a major role in costing Johnson his credibility.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

The themes of American post-war politics and media are well trodden, and an extremely wide array of sources that discuss the relationship between the two is available. Acknowledging that this work cannot examine the entire breadth of research in this field, the literature review will focus on several key areas, all of which are focused and relevant to the topic at hand.

A review of some important works on propaganda is also required. While this project does not focus exclusively on the propagandist tactics of the administration, there is an aspect of Johnson's relationship with the press that would benefit from an understanding of how propaganda works in a democratic society. Understanding the principles behind effective advertising and communication - the selling of an idea to a large proportion of the population - is key when looking at the credibility gap and its causes. The Johnson administration was guilty of failing to do this with its policies and an understanding of those philosophies will clarify the argument that the underlying reason for the administration's failure was the lack of a proactive strategy to sell its policies in a manner that did not arouse the suspicion of the American press and public. This section of the literature review will discuss key arguments about the meaning of propaganda, how it is effectively disseminated and the possible effects of a failure in propaganda.

Leading on from this, a discussion of public opinion polls, the media and government will be helpful. This research focuses quite heavily on the Johnson administration and its reaction to both the decline in public support and media hostility towards the president, and the extent to which this reaction was a cause or an effect of changes in public opinion. This section will discuss how public opinion has been monitored through opinion polls and how it is judged and interpreted by governments – and specifically the US government and the Johnson administration, in particular. The effects of media coverage on public opinion are discussed, and the conclusion drawn is that the

media has some power over the direction of public sentiment that is already nascent, suggesting, in turn, the potential limits to the extent to which there was a genuine opportunity for the Johnson administration to sway either the media or public opinion, or both, concerning its key policy objectives.

The final element of the literature review will be split into two sections. The first is a brief biography of Lyndon Johnson, which is necessary in order to understand the president's vast experience in the Senate and how this affected his decision-making skills and habits, as well as his interaction with the press during this time. A discussion of the historiography of the Vietnam War will form the second part of this section. The war has been extensively studied by scholars and was crucial to the Johnson presidency and the credibility gap that engulfed him. An essential conclusion of this project is that Johnson was not able to successfully adapt his style from the personal one that he used as a senator – the so-called "Johnson treatment" – to a style that was more inclusive, sounded less as if he were being prompted and was camera-friendly, such as was needed for a president who found himself facing news cameras and journalists on a daily basis. It is therefore necessary to understand this style.

Finally, an examination of Johnson's personality is required. His legendarily mercurial personality has been the subject of numerous works, and it is important to take into account how influential he was on those around him and how willing he was to be influenced, himself, and the ways in which his own views on subjects such as the media shaped his presidency.

Propaganda

There is a rich historiography on American history and culture during the 1960s. Much has been written on the subject of propaganda, and it is imperative to reflect on this material so that a link can be made between the theoretical aspects of propaganda and the hard realities of life in America in the 1960s. In order to understand how government propaganda, democracy and war are linked it is vital to offer a definition of propaganda and explain how it pertains to the study of war and the effects it may have on the hearts and minds of the people that it is aimed at.

Nicholas O'Shaughnessy agrees that defining propaganda is difficult; "It is inevitable that there will be no collective agreement about the definition of propaganda."[1] Propaganda has been described as simply "A form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (but, one could argue, such a statement covers almost all communication).[2] It is, however, important to distinguish propaganda from the wider term of communication, as not all communication can be classed as propaganda. Aronson and Pratkanis have described how propaganda is consumed; "Every time we turn on the radio or television, every time we open a book, magazine or newspaper, someone is trying to educate us, to convince us to buy a product, to persuade us to vote for a candidate or to subscribe to some version of what is right, true or beautiful."[3] In its base form, then, propaganda is not simply communication. It is in fact an attempt to coerce an intended audience into thinking, believing or acting in a specific way. When applied to a combat scenario such as the Vietnam War, it is used to boost morale both at home and amongst combatants, and aimed at the enemy to damage their self-esteem and unity. In order to effectively sell propaganda, a propagandist needs to know their audience. He or she needs to empathise with them and their values, at some level, and understand what will make them respond

[1] N O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 14.
[2] G Jowett and V O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (London: Sage, 1999), p. 1.
[3] E Aronson and A Pratkanis, *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (London: W H Freeman, 2000), p. 3.

with the desired reaction; moreover, effective propaganda is largely invisible, and may be indistinguishable from regular news reports and government messages. In this respect, the 1960s and particularly the Johnson years are very interesting to look at from a propaganda perspective. As a new technological era dawned, new ways to both collect and disseminate information became available to the administration, placing the political actors of the period at the beginning of a new era of propaganda. On top of this, the Vietnam situation offered an opportunity for the administration to propagandise the war to sell to the American people using the relatively new medium of television and the burgeoning mass media – going beyond simple communication to become an attempt to influence public views on the subject of war. Jowett and O'Donnell have made the point that propaganda in all its forms serves a purpose; "Advertising in the capitalist system serves the same function as the poster art of authoritarian Socialism."[4] While Soviet poster art was government sanctioned and set out the goals of socialism in very clear, black and white terms, advertising persuades in the capitalist world through more suggestive messages praising products and those who buy them, driving sales and pushing on the capitalist machine. In America, products are sold. In Soviet Russia the ideology was sold by the posters, in effect, becoming the product.

The idea of propaganda is not always well regarded for this reason – the word has connotations of deception and the overriding perception of propagandists in the West is of lying politicians and a nightmarish Orwellian vision in which governments that cannot tell the truth. Philip Taylor has commented that propaganda, "obscures our windows on the world by providing layers of distorting condensation."[5] He means that propaganda is used to cloud the mind; to tell us what we want to hear or how to live our lives. O'Shaughnessy likewise states that propaganda is "[t]he obverse of reason." And rational persuasion.[6] Propaganda used during war, particularly on the home

[4] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, p. 10.
[5] P Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda From the Ancient World to the Modern Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 1.
[6] O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda*, p. 17.

front, attempts to portray the enemy as clearly morally inferior. In the case of the United States in Vietnam, the domestic news media portrayed a completely different story, and laid much of the blame for escalation on the American political hierarchy. When such confusion reigns and enemies are difficult to distinguish from friends, there is little wonder that the general public tends to see propaganda as something of a black art. O'Shaughnessy believes that propaganda is not simply one aspect of military activity, but that this activity itself is inherently propagandist either partially or entirely.[7] This plays into activity aimed at the home front during times of military movement, such as Vietnam.

With that said, not all types of persuasion can be labelled propaganda. In their work *Age of Propaganda,* Aronson and Pratkanis discuss the evolution of the form of propaganda from its classical origin by quoting Paul Linebarger (a specialist in psychological warfare); "The classical rhetorical techniques of the ancient Greeks and Romans – which were avidly studied by those responsible for crafting the governments of Western Europe and America – were aimed at creating discourse that could illuminate the issue at hand. …The end result was an education for both the audience and the speakers."[8] Persuasion and propaganda – while strongly linked – are not one and the same. Two people with an equal standing can engage in discourse and attempt to persuade the other of his or her point of view. It then follows that propaganda normally arises from the attempt by those with power to coerce those without power into furthering their agenda in some other way. Examples of this can be seen in the depression of the 1930s; the dire economic situation led to desperation among many and "saviours" sprang up across the country to cure the ills of society. Governor Huey Long of Louisiana and Father Charles Coughlin, an Irish-Canadian priest, were among the first to effectively use radio to disseminate propaganda to a wide audience.[9] Long was particularly prolific, employing masses of stenographers to correspond with an enormous mailing

[7] O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda*, p. 36.
[8] P A Linebarger, cited in Aronson and Pratkanis, *Age of Propaganda*, p. 12.
[9] There are several important biographies of Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin – one interesting work combining their careers is A Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

list. It follows then that propaganda can normally be distinguished from persuasion; propaganda is linked with larger processes within society in which both the speaker and the listener are invested, while persuasion is more of an individual experience. Propaganda is mass suggestion, and this is how it is differentiated from persuasion.

Several authors have attempted to define propaganda tactics and effects; there is a multitude of work on its measurable effects, and the extent to which it has any. O'Shaughnessy feels that the measure of its impact is, "impossible to gauge and therefore permanently subject to dispute,"[10] and instead questions why propaganda can flourish even in a more educated society, one which has been brought up amidst increasingly advanced technology and the relatively modern innovation of the mass media. O'Shaughnessy asks whether the propagandist is practising self-deception as much as trying to deceive others, and argues that, "We can become co-conspirators in our own self deceit."[11] Propagandists offer an escape not only for the masses, but for themselves as well. This attitude links in with O'Shaughnessy's views on deceit within propaganda; he argues that in today's cynical society it is difficult for "classic" forms of propaganda to gain any purchase and new, disguised forms of propaganda have risen. O'Shaughnessy is slightly more dubious about how controllable the press is than writers such as Ellul and Chomsky, noting that, "The press can only ever be influenced and not controlled,"[12] in a democracy. O'Shaughnessy concludes that propaganda can be overlooked easily by historians and believes that in twentieth century history, "Propaganda must be understood not as a peripheral aspect of history, but as a fulcrum." He makes a valid argument; propaganda is at the heart of political communication and indeed the need to influence the common people is vital in a democracy for governments to continue to remain in power. By propagandising in the "correct" manner, governments can discredit opponents, justify wars, argue for unpopular policies and subtly influence the people under their control. This is never more the

[10] O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda*, p. 37.
[11] Ibid., p. 47.
[12] Ibid., p. 233.

case than during wartime, where it is necessary to ensure that morale is kept up amongst non-combatants.

French theologian and sociologist Jacques Ellul is another such writer. His work *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, first published in 1962, is a cornerstone in the study of the field. Ellul states that the notion of propaganda as a manipulation of the minds of individuals is completely wrong. "It is no longer to transform an opinion", he opines, "but to arouse an active and mythical belief."[13] Ellul sees the goal of modern propaganda as that of making people passively participate in the same manner as a football fan influences the players on the pitch – "Though not physically in the game [the fan] makes his presence felt psychologically by rooting for the players, exciting them, and pushing them to outdo themselves."[14] This makes the audience an effective twelfth man, inciting feats of physical and mental heroics from the players with their fervour. War propaganda acts in exactly the same way – substituting the football field for the battlefield and the players for soldiers. In this respect then, propaganda becomes a vital tool for armies and governments; if the people can be mobilised to support the troops, more efficient, motivated soldiers who take more pride in their work is the result, and with that comes a host of benefits. Ellul believes that the viewer of propaganda does not need intricate details; the more data is taken in, the more simplistic the picture that is drawn by the target. In this respect, propaganda does its job by providing a deluge of facts; swamping media and entertainment outlets induces an almost hypnotic state, claims Ellul. His statements have left an enduring mark on the study of the field since the publication of *Propaganda* and its translation in 1965; the advent of the mass media and the new tactics which have been employed in the meantime have lent an eerie credibility to his beliefs regarding media. The Internet and twenty-four hour news outlets have ensured that the deluge of information that Ellul discussed is in full effect in the Western world. While it seems unlikely that traditional propaganda techniques would be easily swallowed even in this climate, when taken in conjunction with O'Shaughnessy's

[13] J Ellul, *Propaganda* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 25.
[14] Ibid., p. 27.

argument for the existence of a more sophisticated, hidden propaganda, it is difficult to ignore the significance of Ellul's writings.

Noam Chomsky is another especially important author in the field of propaganda, particularly political propaganda. He has argued on multiple occasions that fear is the greatest weapon that governments and propagandists have to spread their ideologies. This has traditionally been interpreted in the United States as fear of Communism, a worldview that has been seen as particularly anti-democratic in the United States. The language used in propaganda to describe these "evils" brings to mind negative thoughts and fearful comparisons; according to Chomsky, the language used about the Soviet Union during the Cold War warranted intervention; "Language that was used in the West was that the rot may spread and the virus may infect others."[15] Chomsky argues that this fear is one of the central tools of propaganda and vital to the propaganda model envisioned by both Chomsky and Edward S. Herman.[16] By instilling fear into the population, propagandists seek to ensure that popular support will follow. He believes that the most integral aspect of media propaganda is the intellectual culture of the people in charge, and has regularly discussed the subversive nature of American democracy; "An alternative conception of democracy is that the public should be barred from managing of their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled."[17] Chomsky has also stated that, "Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state."[18] It is clear that Chomsky adheres to the idea of propaganda as deception or an attempt to hoodwink the people – we have already seen the

[15] Cited in Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, p. 283.
[16] Chomsky discusses the propaganda model in several of his works, but it was largely introduced in N Chomsky and E. S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988). This was later adapted into a three-hour documentary film, entitled *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media.* Lyndon B Johnson's press secretary and a prominent member of his advisory staff for much of his presidency, Bill Moyers, interviewed Chomsky in 1988 on his *World of Ideas* series for the *Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)*. Moyers notes that Johnson considered Chomsky subversive at the eight-minute mark of the interview. This interview is available to view on Youtube in two parts, both accessed on 3 August 2017 at the web addresses; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJU2c7YfQTE and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjKwdWJsTk0 .
[17] N Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), p. 10.
[18] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

popularity of attacks such as this on the propaganda machine. Chomsky argues that in America, a country that has rarely seen wars fought on its own soil, it is necessary to mobilise the people to support foreign wars; "The public sees no reason to get involved in foreign adventures, killing, and torture. So you *have* to whip them up."[19] He marks war propaganda for particular disdain, discussing the US World War I propaganda directive thusly, "The Creel commission succeeded, within six months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical, war-mongering population which wanted to destroy everything German."[20] Chomsky has been particularly scathing about America's actions in Vietnam, noting that during the 1960s, propaganda policies were, "semi-open, but in a kind of indirect way,"[21] and blasting the propaganda activities of influential figures such as Adlai Stevenson and Dean Rusk. It is clear that Chomsky has severe reservations about the art of propaganda; he mistrusts the very idea of propaganda and believes that its use undermines democracy and severely damages the legitimacy of any government or agency involved in the process. It is unquestionably important to maintain a level of distance and scepticism toward the use of propaganda for deeply immoral or even illegal goals, and this becomes particularly relevant when discussing the Johnson administration and the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam. This does not, however, suggest that all propaganda is inherently wrong or inappropriate, as Chomsky does.

Terence Qualter's work, *Opinion Control in the Democracies*, is largely dedicated to quantifying and explaining how official propaganda is spread. Qualter comes up with and adapts several ways of explaining how propaganda can be concocted and disseminated, and believes that propaganda is not simply the act of misleading the public, saying of World War II propagandists, "When they thought it would serve their purpose they also told the truth."[22] However, he bases his assumptions on the idea that credibility is more important than the truth – for propaganda to be truly effective, it must seem credible, even if it is not necessarily honest in what it is saying. This is a

[19] Ibid., p. 30.
[20] Ibid., p. 11.
[21] N Chomsky with D Barsamian, *Propaganda and the Public Mind: Conversations with Noam Chomsky* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 2001), p. 35.
[22] T H Qualter, *Opinion Control In The Democracies* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 113.

common sense approach to the topic; particularly in wartime; as long as propaganda stays on message and does not appear ludicrous at first glance, it has a chance of being taken seriously. Qualter explains this view with an example: "Propaganda battles which degenerate into a slanging of the opposition may be emotionally satisfying to those taking part, but few are persuaded by being abused."[23] Qualter has thus defined propaganda as, "The deliberate attempt by the few to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the many by the manipulation of symbolic communication."[24] He has also offered an effective typology of propaganda as adapted from Oliver Thomson. These are paraphrased here and are important to note. There is political propaganda, which embraces all partisan propaganda on behalf of parties and causes and includes appeals to patriotism, nationalism and loyalty as well as the symbolic use of flags, anthems, etc. – this is traditional propaganda. Economic propaganda, such as propaganda designed to sell a product, includes creating and maintaining confidence, which is an important psychological tool. War and military propaganda is essentially psychological warfare, and can at different times include demoralising the enemy or sustaining the moral of allies. Diplomatic propaganda is similar, used to provoke an intended feeling in a potential friend or foe. Didactic propaganda is the propaganda of good citizenship; it is used to combat disease, dirt, overpopulation and anti-social or unhealthy habits, and often used in totalitarian states. Ideological propaganda is the promotion of the propagandist's ideology, and is analogous to the idea of brainwashing, upsetting and rebuilding the mind of the target. Escapist propaganda is the diverting of emotional energies, used to redirect the attention of a population that is facing serious unrest – American political scientist Harold Lasswell, who published *Propaganda Technique in the World War* in 1927, stated that catharsis was a principal notion of propaganda used in well-developed totalitarian nations.[25]

[23] Ibid., p. 136.
[24] Ibid., p. 124.
[25] Harold Lasswell's work is important to note here. *Power and Personality* (New York: Norton, 1976 [1st pub.1948]) remains an influential cornerstone in the study of propaganda and his early analyses of wartime propaganda were integral to the formation of propaganda studies – *Propaganda Technique in the World Wars* is an excellent example.

Qualter himself believes that the significance of this typology lies not in whether it is definitive, but in how it draws attention to the broad range of activities that now fall under the umbrella of propaganda and represent part of the process.[26] Now that propaganda is not judged simply by the content and as much – if not more – by the process that is followed, researchers have been able to widen the scope and develop new ways to investigate propaganda. Qualter concludes – rightly – that while propaganda carries a larger sway than was realised in the past, it is usually not as effective as propagandists would have us believe.

Philip M. Taylor has contributed to the understanding of propaganda and its history; specifically with his work *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda From the Ancient World to the Present Day.* For his part, he agrees with Qualter's assertion that modern propaganda – at least in its original form – did not intentionally lie to the public; of the British World War I propaganda campaign, which set the modern standard, he writes that, "Falsehoods were eschewed in the belief that they would ultimately be exposed and thereby jeopardize the credibility of those facts that had been released."[27] Taylor wonders if propaganda plays on the faith aspect of human belief and whether this is the reason why propaganda is at its most effective when it "preaches to the already converted."[28] Taylor appears to be a more idealistic writer than someone like Chomsky, who has bluntly made known his disdain for the role of propaganda. Taylor has stated of propaganda that, "Henceforth the only honourable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble – that words are more powerful than munitions,"[29] as well as citing the need for "Peace propagandists," and stating that, "Propaganda has the potential to serve a constructive, civilized and peaceful purpose."[30] Taylor recognises that we live in an age of propaganda, and that with recent propaganda, image has taken over as the most important aspect of the whole exercise, conforming to Qualter's view on this matter.

[26] Qualter, *Opinion Control in The Democracies*, p. 128.
[27] Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, p. 3.
[28] Ibid., p. 8.
[29] Ibid., p. 16.
[30] Ibid., p. 324.

It is clear that there is a vast array of literature available to peruse on the subject of propaganda, covering arguments both for and against the medium in terms of costs and benefits. Many writers seem to lie somewhere in between support and disdain and some, such as Qualter and Taylor, see propaganda as an almost inevitable fact – something handed down from ancient times – inherent to human nature. When propaganda is used truthfully in such a way as to supplement a war effort or denounce antisocial behaviour it can be a helpful tool, but the dangers inherent in mass persuasion will remain. Others, in the mould of Chomsky, decry the existence of propaganda as the tool of the powerful, a way to mask political power plays and agendas that would otherwise see politicians denounced by the public. It is plain to see that propaganda is a demonstrably dangerous tool when used on an already volatile or suggestible crowds of people; this is something that Western governments found out to their cost following World War II, with anti-German and anti-Japanese sentiment still running high it became difficult to quell what propaganda started. It is easy to see the benefits of both sides of the propaganda debate. What is clear is that propaganda is very much an integral part of modern warfare and domestic crisis and has been for some time. Although it may not be as influential or far-reaching as propagandists themselves would have us believe and indeed requires some effort on the part of the individual consumer to be truly successful, it is nevertheless a force to be reckoned with and one that should be treated with some trepidation.

There are many explanations of propaganda, and how propaganda works and yet it is difficult to quantify exactly how propaganda influences a society. With that said, it is clear that propaganda is something that must necessarily be studied and reflected upon in order to gain an understanding of how governments and those in positions of authority try to influence those around them. It is thus important to come to a working definition of propaganda. Having considered the work of those who have studied the matter in depth, I would define propaganda as; *The concerted attempt by an influential person, or group of people, to spread a political agenda and manipulate the opinions of a targeted group for specific purposes.* In linking this back to the Johnson administration, the rest of this literature review will look to explain the conditions under which Johnson and his

administrative staff worked in the field of public opinion, as well as explain some of the difficulties involved in the study of propaganda. One is that it is impossible to extricate propaganda from the circumstances that surround the propagandist; Johnson's experiences with the creation and selling of domestic and foreign policy are indicative of this. Another is that, as Ellul notes, it is ultimately not possible to determine how much influence one source or another has on the hearts and minds of the public, be it in voting for one party over another or, in this case, lending longer-term support to the political ideology and plans of the government and the policies that ensue. Some of the difficulties faced by the Johnson administration in seeking to measure its own success are noted in the section on opinion polling, while Johnson's problematic relationship with the press and his attempts to manipulate public opinion are examined in the next section on the media.

Section II – Public Opinion Polls And The Media

The Media

This section looks at work that discusses how the media operated in American society in the 1960s, and, further to that, how Johnson interacted with the fourth estate.

In 1959, in his work, *The Fourth Branch of Government*, future Johnson staff member Douglass Cater made the point that the media, "Have a vast power to shape government," in the very act of selecting which information to report and which to ignore.[31] "The words that fail to get projected might as well not have occurred," he states.[32] This works in conjunction with Altschull's discussion on the role of the spin-doctor, or, in the case of the presidency, the press secretary:

> The role of the spin-doctor is similar to that of the "sociological propagandist" as described by Ellul. It is both "to hide political reality by talking about it" and to give the public the opposite impression – "that it understands everything clearly." He or she, Ellul wrote, "Must give the public distorted news and intentions, knowing clearly beforehand what conclusions the public will draw from them.[33]

The idea is that in order to oversee the will of the people well, the government must take into account the power of the media, in essence leading to the media acting as a further set of checks and balances on top of those already provided within the federal government of the United States. Timothy Cook, however, disagrees with Cater and Altschull's theories on the press; he notes that the "expectations, rules and regulations," that limit the branches of government do not apply to the press and wider media groups; because they are "largely controlled by private corporations," they

[31] Cater is an important source on the media; as one of the original editors of *The Reporter* magazine, he was already vastly experienced with the American media and joined the Johnson government one month after his third book on the subject, *Power in Washington* (New York: Vintage, 1964) was published. Cater's obituary notes that he became a specialist in education under Johnson. For more information see R McG Thomas, Jr., "Douglass Cater Is Dead at 72; Educator and Presidential Aide," *New York Times*, 16 September 1995, accessed on 17 July 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/16/obituaries/douglass-cater-is-dead-at-72-educator-and-presidential-aide.html.

[32] D Cater, *The Fourth Branch of Government* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 62.

[33] J H Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Media and Public Policy* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1995), p. 155.

cannot therefore be a branch of government.[34] Cook's representation of the arguments against the media's influence is important to note, and offers an interesting and pertinent counter to the likes of Cater and Altschull.

The question of the media's influence on public opinion is complex, and has long been debated in a similar manner to the discussion of propaganda. If Ellul's theory holds true, and media saturation is an important part of disseminating propaganda, then it stands to reason that the increased media activity that took place in the 1960s would have a strong effect on the message that was being sent to the American people, and the effectiveness of that message. Cater believed that this was the case. This links in with Richard Neustadt's view on presidential prestige: "[Any president's] prestige turns on what members of his public think they want and think they get."[35] Neustadt's views on presidential prestige and power are highly relevant here. Neustadt believes that the choices a president makes are the only means of shielding his own power and prestige that lie within his own influence. This is interesting to note, as Neustadt therefore offers the view that much of what determines how presidents are viewed by the public is not within their control, whereas if the president can control what the public believes, then he can protect his own prestige. In a sense, this links back to the idea of propaganda as a means of control; by controlling the flow of information, the president can protect his own power. This work agrees with Neustadt's idea, and finds that the process of managing how information was disseminated was certainly vital in the case of Vietnam, in which news media was increasingly dominated by a new and daunting challenge for the Johnson administration: television. The administration was required to learn to deal with news reports that sometimes ran contrary to the official line on current events, particularly in Vietnam,

[34] T E Cook, *Governing The News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 109.

[35] R Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 90. Neustadt's work has been among the pre-eminent scholarship on the presidency since the first edition of *Presidential Power* was published in 1960. For a further critique on Neustadt's work, in which it is theorised that Neustadt can offer a solid theoretical basis for much future study on presidential power, see M J Dickinson, "Neustadt, New Institutionalism, and Presidential Decision Making: A Theory and Test," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 2 (June 2005), pp. 259-88.

and contained an accompanying imagery that could be far more vivid and compelling than a newspaper report. When discussing the influence of television media, Iyegar has noted that, "Television news shapes the American public's political priorities. These effects appear to be neither momentary, as the results indicate, nor permanent, as [his work's] time series results reveal." Iyegar's studies on the matter led him to conclude that "It is one thing to understand that American boys are fighting and dying in Vietnam; quite another to watch them fight and die. In each case, so it is argued, the concrete visual details matter enormously."[36] Writing twenty years after Johnson's presidency ended, he called television "a mature and powerful force in American politics. In commanding attention and shaping opinion, television is now an authority virtually without peer."[37] Because Iyegar's research into television as an influence on public perception took place twenty years after Johnson's presidency, it is difficult to completely apply it to the conditions of the 1960s – while there is no doubt that television became an important part of the average American's life by the time of Johnson's administration, it had not yet fully gained the mass audience that it would decades into the future. Nevertheless, there is merit in looking at Iyegar's work; by 1967, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) created their own in house polling unit and brought influential pollsters such as Louis Harris into the fold to legitimise their operation – the other two major news networks – American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) quickly followed suit.[38] By explicitly moving into the field of opinion polls, something previously disseminated mainly through the syndication of Gallup and Harris polls in newspapers. For example, the television networks showed that they were becoming the dominant news source for Americans, and this should have been a warning sign for Johnson not to be complacent. Given this context, is little wonder that Vietnam is thought of as the first truly televised war; the Korean conflict was

[36] S Iyegar, *News That Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 35.
[37] Ibid., p. 133. See also D Cater and R Adler (eds.), *Television as a Social Force* (New York: Praeger, 1975), which gives a contemporary viewpoint on the influence of television.
[38] T Mann and G Orren (eds.), *Media Polls in American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), p. 2.

covered in part by film cameras, but the ownership of television sets and the popularity of television new broadcasts within American households were not as pervasive as they became by the 1960s.

John Mueller, writing in 1973, disputed the idea that television was so influential on Americans, claiming that his evidence "clearly show[s] that whatever impact television had, it was not enough to reduce support for the [Vietnam] war below the levels attained by the Korean War, when television was in its infancy, until casualty levels had far surpassed those of the earlier war."[39] Iyegar broadly agrees; speaking specifically for audiences in the Unites States, he felt that the evidence gathered in his studies, "implies an American public with a limited memory for last month's news and a recurrent vulnerability to today's. When television news focuses on a problem, the public's priorities are altered, and altered again as television news moves on to something new." There was, Iyegar concluded, no basis for the "vividness hypothesis," wherein intense images cause more of a reaction at least in terms of "dramatic vignettes," on television.[40] Michael Arlen, television columnist from the 1960s, agrees with this view in his collection of columns, noting the superficiality of three and five-minute news broadcasts on television about Vietnam.[41] The discussion over the effect of television is important to note; during Johnson's time in office there is no question that he took the television media seriously as an influence on the people, but there is still a question as to whether this was actually the case. The argument put forward in this thesis would tend to concur with Arlen's view on the superficiality of news broadcasts and Iyegar's sceptical outlook on their effects; while the American people were no doubt influenced in some way by television media, the vividness hypothesis is not a complete model for the influence of television on the general public in this period.

On the other hand, the idea of the media having a key agenda-setting role is important, particularly in terms of television media; agenda setting comes from the frequency of discussion,

[39] J Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973), p. 167.
[40] Iyegar, *News That Matters*, p. 174.
[41] M J Arlen, *The Living Room War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), passim.

and is one way in which television can prove influential. By regularly discussing a single issue, broadcast journalists could potentially increase that issue's prevalence in national debates. This is similar to media priming, in which the media attend to specific issues and neglect others, altering the standards by which people evaluate the news. This is discussed by Cappella and Jamieson, who discuss how these effects can frame and explain news coverage, and how the public reacts to certain stimulus; it is no doubt important in looking at how Johnson approached and understood broadcast media.[42]

In the broader sense of opposition, Stanley Karnow felt that the press as a single entity followed, rather than truly influenced: "The press, with all its shortcomings, tended to follow rather than lead the U.S. public, whose opinions were usually shaped more by such events as the tax surcharge or the death of a local boy than by television broadcasts and newspaper commentaries."[43] Media and public affairs scholar Robert Entman believes that, "Journalists cannot do much about either their vulnerability to the political market or their inadvertent exercise of political power through choices that slant the news." Entman concludes that this convinces many politicians that the press are against them or deliberately biased, leading to a tendency amongst high profile politicians to manage news, and take a cautious approach to dealing with journalists – something that, whether based on truth or not, is important to note generally, and that directly describes Johnson's approach to the press.[44]

The two views possessed by Entman and Karnow – that the press "slants" the news, or that the press "follows" public opinion – are essentially in opposite camps, and ultimately sum up the arguments over the value of press reporting as a tool to sway public opinion. Entman's belief that the press are agents of political influence almost by default is challenges Karnow's view that the

[42] J N Cappella and K H Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 51-52.
[43] S Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (London: Century, 1983), p. 488.
[44] R Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 38.

press do not instigate change. Both of these arguments are of equal validity, and it can be difficult to know how influential the press truly is as there is often no obvious sign of their impact on the general public. This dissertation does not dismiss either summary of the impact of press opinion, but would tend to side with Entman's analysis; while the press are not as influential as they would perhaps like to be, there is little doubt that press reporting has at least *some* effect on those who read or watch. Whether that is an influencing effect or a reinforcing one, it is nevertheless important to note. Entman sums up the perspective developed in this thesis best when he says, "To participate effectively in politics, the public must remain responsive to the changing conditions portrayed (however imperfectly) in the news. The implication is clear: democracy in the United States is significantly affected by the performance and power of journalism."[45] In the case of Lyndon Johnson, media reporting was of great importance. His difficulty in understanding the media and how to successfully interact with them to exploit their potential authority over public opinion was one of the defining characteristics of his presidency, and this will be explored in the next section.

[45] Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens*, p. 88.

The Media and the Johnson Presidency

Kathleen Turner's work on Johnson's media relations during his time in office has been greatly influential to this dissertation; her research into the issues faced by both Johnson and the press during the formation and continuation of their difficult working relationship has been invaluable to the conclusions drawn about Johnson's reactive strategy. Turner describes at great length the difficulties that Johnson faced in his dealings with the press: "He was particularly uncertain of the appropriate responses in an age in which informing the people depended to such a large extent on media – channels with which he was uncomfortable and interpreters with whom he often did not agree."[46] This relates back to one of the core working beliefs of this dissertation; that Johnson could not adapt his persona and strategy to the rigors of the presidency; whereas his time in the Senate was spent dealing largely with singular members of the press and media establishment, where Johnson could work his legendary powers of persuasion with consummate ease and professionalism, he was never able to adapt this to a larger scale to deal with press conferences and the more direct contact that he needed to have with the mass media in his new position. This thesis posits that this was one of the reasons that Johnson developed a reactive strategy that ultimately hampered his credibility and undermined his presidency. Turner concludes that Johnson's relationship with the press is tragic and that, "As a story of communication failure, its implications for contemporary American life are profound."[47] This thesis would not dispute the tragedy of Johnson's inability to communicate with the press, but it does look to offer a further explanation as to why this was the case, and where the failure in Johnson's methods lay; Turner's lengthy description of the Johnsonian failure to communicate with the press is undoubtedly influential, but does not go into detail about the reactive nature of the strategies that Johnson employed to cope with mounting criticism. Miller and Sigelman argue that while the advent of mass media and large scale press coverage through both newspaper and television in the 1960s led to the

[46] K J Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 252.
[47] Ibid., p. 254.

homogenisation of Johnson's political statements, the president and his staff did make an attempt to vary the content of these to "accord with the predisposition of his audience." They argue that for Johnson, as for his successors, the audience that he spoke to was in essence part of the message he wished to put across; by tailoring his political commitments to certain audiences he was able to aim statements directly at Hanoi, or to Congress, or even to the unruly White House press corps.[48] This thesis does not dispute that Johnson made an attempt to tailor his speeches – in fact there is evidence from the Johnson archives that this is the case as his speechwriters worked on addresses towards many different aspects of society. It does however argue that Johnson was not necessarily successful in using these public engagements to put forward a pro-active and cohesive strategy towards either Vietnam or his domestic policies, ultimately undermining his credibility with the majority of Americans.

Much has been written of Johnson's relationship with the media in the biographies that have been produced on his presidency by the likes of Robert Caro and Robert Dallek; the merits of several of these works will be discussed at length in a following section. However, several of Johnson's contemporaries including two of Johnson's press secretaries have written at length about their time dealing with his media relations. His final press secretary, George Christian, has written about the last year of Johnson's presidency, while his second appointment, George Reedy, has written about his own time in the position during 1964 and 1965. Both men believe that Johnson gave particular attention to the media; Christian writes that "Lyndon Johnson absorbed news and current events like a blotter. During the day he listened to as many radio newscasts as he could. And in the Oval Office the Associated Press and United Press International teletypes clacked away until he retired to the Mansion late at night… Almost always he was well ahead of his staff on fast-breaking news."[49] Reedy makes a telling point when he describes Johnson as regarding the political

[48] L W Miller and L Sigelman, "Is The Audience the Message? A Note on LBJ's Vietnam Statements," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 1978), pp. 71-80.
[49] G Christian, *The President Steps Down* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 7.

process, "*entirely* in terms of popularity."[50] Reedy felt that one of Johnson's core beliefs was that information should be correctly arranged in order to serve a purpose, and in doing so may have identified one of the defining reasons behind the credibility gap; for a man who wanted to arrange information in such a way as to vindicate his choices and decisions, it was difficult for Johnson to deal with a hostile press who were not interested in his definition of information. Reedy clarifies that Johnson thought of journalists as critics, first and foremost, rather than spreaders of information. He also notes how, "Of all the LBJ weaknesses, perhaps the most important was his inability to understand the press."[51] The pollster Louis Harris agreed with this summary, and believed that Johnson, "simply was not a reader of the press," and was prone to react to events in a "most personalized way."[52] The president's press secretaries are important to this research; their actions directly affected Johnson's perception amongst both newsmen and the general public; it is difficult to make a judgement over how effective each individual secretary that Johnson employed was, but Towle notes that their success or failure depended greatly on Johnson's faith in each man; he believes that the president placed less faith in George Reedy and more in Bill Moyers and George Christian, leading to the latter two men being more palatable to the press than Reedy.[53] Doris Kearns offers a slightly differing summary of Johnson's ability with the media; she believed that the technological innovations available to him opened up a wealth of opportunities, from taping his own television appearances to speaking with the Soviet Premier at a moment's notice.[54] Kearns believed that Johnson made an attempt to take advantage of these advances, but while there is no doubt that he used the medium of television more than previous leaders, there is a serious question as to whether Johnson was able to actually take advantage of the platform to put forward his agenda in an effective and proactive manner.

[50] G Reedy, *Lyndon B Johnson: A Memoir* (New York: Andrews & McMeel, 1982), p. 5. The emphasis is Reedy's.
[51] Ibid., p. 50.
[52] L Harris, *The Anguish of Change* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), pp. 16, 24.
[53] M J Towle, "On Behalf of the President: Four Factors Affecting the Success of the Presidential Press Secretary," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Spring 1997), p. 307.
[54] D Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & The American Dream* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p. 400.

The writings of Johnson's aides on the matter of press interaction are important to note; Johnson's key aide Jack Valenti perhaps sums up the administration's view of the press and their objectives in the opening sentences of his discussion of press relations in his account of working at the White House. "Every day the press and the president meet as adversaries," he noted, "Hundreds of newsmen, monitoring the White House, sight along their barrel the vision of presidential ineptitude implanted in the crosshairs."[55] Valenti's view of the media – much like Johnson's own opinion – was that the media was out to ruin the administration using whatever means were necessary. Townsend Hoopes, who worked as an assistant secretary of defence under Robert McNamara, used several newspaper articles from 1967 and 1968, to create a damning indictment of the administration's reaction to press scrutiny; he claimed that "The president's reaction to this critical broadside was to wrap himself in the mantle of War Leader and stand forth as defender of the faith."[56] Stanley Karnow extends this back to 1966, claiming that, as criticism mounted, "Johnson surrounded himself with congressional loyalists."[57] Doris Kearns agrees with this view; she notes that, "Under siege, his operational style closed in and insulated him within the White House, where discussion was confined to those who offered no disagreement."[58] Neustadt and May also note the testimony of an unnamed aide; "It was Johnson's custom," the aide noted, "to reach a decision inwardly and *then* organize the process for making that decision appear the result of consultation and debate."[59] One of Johnson's National Security Council staff members, Chester Cooper, noted a similar tendency in the president; "It suited his purpose and his style to give the impression that he was engaging in a lengthy and thorough appraisal in which all points of view were advanced and weighed."[60] Sam Houston Johnson, the president's brother, notes a story in which Johnson sacked

[55] J Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 206.
[56] T Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York: David McKay, 1969), p. 100.
[57] Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 484.
[58] Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & The American Dream*, p. 319.
[59] R Neustadt and E May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1988), p. 79.
[60] C L Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: The Full Story of American Involvement in Vietnam, from Roosevelt to Nixon* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971) p. 292. Chester Cooper's membership of the National Security Council is confirmed in Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Henry Holt, 1971) p. 126. Cooper's

his George Reedy on the spot following an erroneously issued press release, before having him re-hired hours later.[61]

Entman notes that some of the issues Johnson and his aides imagined within the press may have had some grounding in fact; "Even under the best circumstances, presidents' control over news slant is limited. They remain at the mercy of production biases, unexpected events, and unlucky timing, all of which can give the news a negative tilt."[62] While this is an interesting and undoubtedly true phenomenon, this thesis would take the views on Johnson's siege mentality further. His negative and mistrustful view of the press led him into difficulty; because he felt that he could not trust the people responsible for disseminating information, he did not reveal important information to them because of his fear of negative press. This led to the administration being unable to formulate a strong, effective and most importantly, pro-active strategy that could be used continuously throughout the presidency. However, as has been noted by several of Johnson's close advisors and those who have commented on his presidency, the administration tended to overestimate the influence that the press had on public opinion. This echoes the difficulties that the administration also faced when interpreting opinion polls, something that will be shown in the following section.

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obituary in the *New York Times* notes that he was "a backstage player in many of the most critical negotiations of the cold war," during his time in government during the 1950s and 60s. See M Fox, "Chester Cooper, 88, A Player in Diplomacy for Two Decades, is Dead," *New York Times*, 7 November 2005, accessed on 1 October 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/07/obituaries/chester-cooper-88-a-player-in-diplomacy-for-two-decades-is-dead.html?mcubz=0&_r=0.

[61] S H Johnson, *My Brother Lyndon* (Spokane, WA: Cowles, 1970) p. 153.

[62] Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens*, p. 74.

Opinion Polls

In any attempt to understand the American presidency and how it reacts to crises, an analysis of the role of the media and the measuring of public opinion is vital. This section will look at work that has been done on opinion polls, such as *The Superpollsters* by David W. Moore, and apply this to the Johnson administration. It will also examine literature that pertains directly to Johnson's use of polling data, and particularly *LBJ and the Polls* by Bruce Altschuler.[63]

Opinion polls, themselves, are a disputed measure of actual popularity, and one of the objectives of this section is to show how they will be used in this dissertation as a whole. The difficulty of predicting political results and trends was well known even in the 1960s; Herbst notes that policymakers and journalists were wary of polls since the late 1930s and 1940s – early on, the *Literary Digest* Poll which spectacularly failed to predict Franklin D. Roosevelt's landslide victory in 1936 (it forecast that FDR would gain 43% and Landon 57% of the vote) damaged the legitimacy of the art.[64]

The first and most important question to be asked about the political polls, then, is how effective they are. Louis Harris, creator of the influential Harris poll that began national syndication in 1963, once boasted that he worked for over 240 political campaigns between 1956 and 1963, and said of himself, "I elected one President, one prime minister, about 28 governors and maybe close to 60 U.S. Senators."[65] According to Moore, the official figures show that Harris worked on 45 elected senators' campaigns. Harris was particularly defensive about the role that polling could play in the election process; Altschull quotes him as saying that "Polling results can influence election results by as many as four points." Richard Wirthlin, a pollster for Ronald Reagan, agreed with this summary as

[63] Moore's work on polling is particularly interesting to note; as a former editor of *The Gallup Poll*, he has a number of insights on the process of polling and how it can affect the national psyche. Altschuler's work on LBJ and the polls is a vital text in the study of Johnson's attitudes towards public opinion, and provides both analysis and anecdotal evidence as to how poll data was collected, manipulated and dealt with inside the Johnson administration.

[64] S Herbst, *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 90-91.

[65] D W Moore, *The Superpollsters* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), p. 78.

late as the 1980s.[66] George Gallup, for his part, felt that polling was intended to help people decide who to vote for, and "credited the mass media with distributing the polling information the public needed if it were to make those wise decisions in the voting booth."[67]

Altschull notes that the point of polling is "not to find facts but create images and thereby shape opinion."[68] He further states that in his opinion, "It is not the media that shape public opinion. It is rather the holders of power who shape public opinion by using the media as their agents. If the media were to attempt to move public opinion into a position contrary to what is desired by the holders of power, the power holders would counterattack." This opinion holds some weight, as Johnson did indeed attack his critics with some ferocity, both through his press secretaries and his own personal association with influential reporters and editors. The fact remains, however, that by the end of his Presidency, approval ratings declined by a vast amount and his critics were as loud as ever in both the print and visual media. With that in mind, the question must be asked; how could Johnson have launched an effective counterattack towards his critics? The answer does not necessarily lie in the president's interactions with the media. Stanley Karnow, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his work in Vietnam, believed that journalists – particularly those working in television like Walter Cronkite – lagged behind the American people and their attitudes, "reflecting, rather than shaping."[69] This debate about influence or reflection is equally applicable to the discourse on opinion polls. Do they, too, primarily reflect, rather than shape, the attitudes of the American people? The answer would seem obvious – that they do, after all, reflect the views of the mass of respondents. This is the reason why Peter Miller feels that, "journalists must become polling experts," as they, too, are heavily involved in both reflecting and shaping the perceptions of the public.

The question of how polling on the same subject can give large differentials in the results is a pertinent one. In some cases, question wording can affect the answers that are given. For example,

[66] J H Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Media and Public Policy* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1995), p. 46.
[67] Ibid., p. 167.
[68] Ibid., p. 168.
[69] Karnow, *Vietnam, A History*, p. 548.

John Mueller notes that three 1967 polls on Lyndon Johnson's credibility claimed that 64-70% of the people polled thought Johnson was not being honest with the public.[70] In contrast, the Gallup poll published on 10 May 1967 noted that 49% of those polled would prefer Johnson to be chosen as the Democratic Party nominee for the 1968 presidential election, against 37% who opposed his selection.[71] A third set of polls saw the Presidents' approval rating drop below 40% for the first time in August. These three different polling scores reflect the differences in the questions being asked about different aspects of Johnson's effectiveness and standing , despite the basic similarities contained within attempts to gauge Johnson's popularity. Moore recounts a story of George Gallup's early poll work, in which the sample of respondents were asked a question in two different ways. The experiment, as Moore relates, "demonstrated the tendency for people to say yes when asked about unfamiliar issues, a phenomenon commonly referred to these days as 'response acquiescence.'"[72] Mann and Orren explain their own conclusions on this matter as follows:

> The range of acceptable polling methods remains wide enough to permit many legitimate variations in techniques and, consequently, in results. This is so even though political pollsters have every incentive to see that their results are as close as possible to the outcome on election day. The proliferation of national polls makes the identification of quirky results, flukes and blips much easier and quicker than normally. However, the sophisticated observer needs to be aware of the subtle differences between equally well-conducted polls that can still lead to discrepancies in results.[73]

The bias and the differences mentioned by Mann and Orren were no doubt significant when it came to the Johnson administration and their response to polling. By the latter years of Johnson's time in office the government would regularly argue that the wording of Gallup and Harris polls was negative and conducive to increasing the credibility gap, arguing that Johnson had less of an active

[70] Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 167.
[71] G Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 2063.
[72] V O Key, Jr., "Permissive Consensus," in Mann and Orren (eds.), *Media Polls in American Politics*, p. 326.
[73] Mann and Orren (eds.), *Media Polls in American Politics*, pp. 105-106.

role in causing this gap than those who reported on him. This also brings into question how the political opinions or personal motives of the pollsters influence the results of polls. Harris in particular was known to work for political campaigns as well as having his duties with the syndicated polls; Moore notes that he was pulled from his contract to do polling work for CBS in 1967 and replaced with Warren Mitofsky, the first director of the network's election and survey unit.[74]

There is also the difficulty of summarising public opinion on multiple issues. The best method of discerning between the opinions of different groups of the population – differentiating between gender, race, social circumstance and the myriad groups that make up the population of a country – and particularly the United States, is hotly disputed. Mueller sums up his passage on the matter by noting, "Public opinion on very many issues can scarcely be said to exist."[75] Indeed, Susan Herbst agrees with this summarisation; she wrote in 1993 that, "Public opinion simply does not exist. Citizens are rarely interested or educated enough to articulate informed opinions."[76] Mueller also states that his work, "at points becomes a manual on how to prove almost any attitudes with public opinion data."[77] It is clearly difficult to interpret and predict public opinion, and many of the negative views that are attached to both the relevance and accuracy of polling are indicators of this. It should be said, however, that several authors have noted the importance of public opinion polls – not necessarily as a scientific indication of public sentiment, but as a marker for current views on a given situation. Moore has said that, "Polling can, indeed, provide a continuous monitoring of the elusive pulse of democracy,"[78] while E. J. Dionne, Jr., has stated, "Polls can explode journalistic prejudices and preconceptions. They can answer legitimate questions that could not otherwise be answered. Done well they can provide a complex view of how citizens reason, separately and together, about

[74] Moore, *The Superpollsters*, p. 254; Mann and Orren (eds.), *Media Polls in American Politics*, p. 89.
[75] Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 265.
[76] Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, p. 46.
[77] Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 265.
[78] Moore, *The Superpollsters*, p. 357.

public problems."[79] Traugott and Means have argued that "There is little consensus on the manner in which the media's use of polls influences people, but there is also little doubt that it has an effect."[80] John Geer has raised the argument that the very existence of polling has caused a shift, making the argument that polls have fundamentally changed the kind of information available to politicians. "Surveys, despite their flaws, represent a significant improvement in the quality of information available to politicians." As well as this, "The concept of public opinion itself has shifted with the onset of survey research."[81] Finally, Mann and Orren have raised another benefit of opinion polls; "Reporters consequently always need to question conventional wisdom, and polls can be a useful tool for doing this. They give reporters a way to test the riveting anecdote and dramatic personal experience that are the workhorses of traditional journalism."[82]

With all these thoughts in mind, it stands to reason that while opinion polls are difficult, unwieldy tools in gauging actual levels of public opinion on a given subject, they do have their place in the arena of serious political thought. This analysis colours the way in which polls will be used in this thesis. Rather than as a definitive measure of the public view, they will, instead, be used as a starting point for discussion on presidential output, and of the reaction that followed from the Johnson administration once polls were published. Susan Herbst has attempted to summarise the actual impact of opinion polls, noting that the *New York Times* published 380 opinion polls over three years: "The large number of polls in the media has shaped the character of contemporary journalism in the United States."[83] She concludes, "Even though opinion polls are valuable to political candidates, journalists, and presidents – both instrumentally and symbolically – their impact on political expression has not been as dramatic as early pollsters once hoped."[84] Ultimately, this

[79] E J Dionne, Jr., "The Illusion of Technique: The Impact of Polls on Reporters and Democracy," in Mann and Orren (eds.), *Media Polls in American Politics*, p. 166.
[80] M Traugott and J Means, "Problems of Character: Was it the Candidate or the Press," in P Lavrakas, M Traugott and P Miller (eds.), *Presidential Polls and the News Media* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), pp. 196-97
[81] J Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls: A Theory of Democratic Leadership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 50.
[82] Mann and Orren (eds.), *Media Polls in American Politics*, pp. 5-6.
[83] Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, p. 115.
[84] Ibid., p. 175.

thesis disputes certain aspects of that argument and tends to side with the one put forward by the likes of Moore. Herbst is surely correct in arguing that opinion polls may not be the most accurate marker of public opinion, itself, but they are certainly important factors in the ways in which each federal administration has formed its view of, and reacted to, widespread public sentiment; as such they are certainly worthy of further study here.

Johnson's own use of opinion polls is of particular interest to this work, and will be key in observing the way in which his personality led him to react to reports of sliding popularity and how this affected his objectives, and causing him to be swayed by the polls, rather than develop and carry out a singular, proactive strategy.

Polling and the Johnson Presidency

There are several seminal accounts of Johnson's time in office and it is important to discuss the merits of these works and how they relate to the subject of his rhetoric. As well as this, there are several key debates surrounding Johnson and his foreign and domestic policies that should be addressed.

Johnson's use of poll data was revolutionary in terms of presidential interaction with the medium; John Geer notes that Johnson and his predecessor, John F. Kennedy, "clearly signalled the beginning of a new era. These chief executives were the first to integrate survey research into the daily operations of the White House"[85] He goes on to confirm that Johnson commissioned 130 private polls from pollsters such as Oliver Quayle during his time as president, while also receiving regular poll data from staff members such as Bill Moyers, one of his press secretaries. Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro note, regarding the Johnson administration's monitoring of public opinion,

> The White House became a veritable warehouse stocked with the latest public opinion data… The regular flow of these private opinion surveys into the White House provided data on the president's popularity as well as on public preferences for policy issues and for candidates in congressional and gubernatorial races.[86]

Jacobs and Shapiro's description fits in well with the objectives of this piece; with the knowledge that Johnson did indeed focus on details of his popularity, we can see connections with the likes of Reedy, who, as we have seen, believed that Johnson's belief in his ability to read the press was wildly misguided. This work makes the point that while Johnson worked hard to keep up with the views of the public and press through public opinion polls. His inability to understand how to influence these things led to a largely reactive, rather than proactive stance, and a short term

[85] Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls,* p. 84.
[86] Jacobs and Shapiro quoted in ibid., p. 84.

view on difficult situations, rather than one that took into account the larger future. Jacobs' further work on the subject notes that Johnson used Oliver Quayle as a personal pollster for the majority of his presidency, switching briefly to John Kraft and Joseph Napolitan when his confidence in Quayle's reporting faltered in the final year of his presidency. Jacobs and Burns' research on Johnson's opinion polling through Quayle shows that from the beginning of his poll work on Vietnam in 1965, "Quayle dutifully reported to the White House that public opinion was badly split and that the president's "middle ground approach" was strongly opposed." They believe that Johnson used Quayle's polling to form a strategy of diversion to refocus public opinion onto more popular programs and policy positions. White House officials could see with increasing clarity as the war dragged on that it was essential to emphasise more hopeful headlines, and draw attention to the government's successes in Congress. This thesis argues that by not taking a pro-active stance on doing this, the administration failed to move beyond simply reacting to crises, which ultimately undermined their credibility.[87]

Perhaps the most obviously important work on LBJ that pertains to this subject is Bruce Altschuler's *LBJ and the Polls*. Altschuler discusses the limitations in the polling techniques of the time, noting that when he wanted a quick measure of public reaction to a specific event, Johnson "Had to sacrifice depth and reliability." According to Altschuler, Oliver Quayle's polls and methods made analysing sub-groups and thorough questioning of subjects, "Difficult, if not impossible."[88] This critique of polling methods which were the best available at the time compares them with more advanced recent methods of computerised polling. Altschuler makes it clear that, as discussed, the Johnson administration placed a lot of faith in polling and public opinion indicators. When discussing the Great Society and domestic reforms, Altschuler argues that, particularly during the early years of Johnson's presidency when his popularity was high, he was able to use opinion polls to grant him a mandate to implement change – if public opinion was in his favour then Johnson felt he was in the

[87] L Jacobs & M Burns, "The Second Face of the Public Presidency: Presidential Polling and the Shift from Policy to Personality Polling," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Fall 2004), p. 545.
[88] B Altschuler, *LBJ and the Polls* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1990) p. 100.

right, and pushed his plans forward.[89] He used official opinion polls that did not delve too deeply into subjects. These allowed him to forge ahead without becoming involved in niggling discussions over what information could be extrapolated from polls. By keeping things simple, he was able to draw simple conclusions and use these to influence policy.

Ultimately, Altschuler's work on LBJ is important to take into consideration. He points out that while Johnson did take opinion polls seriously, he was also quick to dismiss poll information that did not agree with his own interpretation of events or objectives for the future, quoting the pollster Harris, "Johnson was the truest believers of polls, but only when they tended to support what he was doing."[90] This is significant to note, and links in with one of the most important arguments that this thesis attempts to advance. Johnson and his associates had the tendency to push ahead with their own agenda and blindly ignore evidence which went contrary to this, be it opinion polls, news reports or any opposing hard facts. *LBJ and the Polls* puts across the idea that LBJ's manner of polling worked well as long as he was popular, but would prove problematic when he approached the boundaries of popular consensus. Kagay takes this further, and notes that the administration attempted to discredit pollsters by using differing results to belittle the questions and methodology of pollsters. As we have already seen, question wording can indeed provide differing results; Johnson jumped on this as his popularity waned in an attempt to justify the reasons for the slide; crooked pollsters were to blame for his waning popularity, and the administration was not at fault. This is an argument that ties in closely with the idea that Johnson was unable to develop a long term strategy for dealing with the press. His inability to comprehend that the press could report negatively on the incumbent president meant that he did not have a back-up plan for when things

[89] Ibid., p. 36.
[90] Ibid., *LBJ and the Polls* p. 2.

went wrong, and his personality was such that he took any adverse coverage as a personal slight, something that the press corps picked up on very early on.[91]

Altschuler's work has been noted by historians of LBJ, and those who work specifically in the field of the media. Susan Herbst has noted that Johnson made special efforts to publicise Quayle data that contradicted the likes of Harris and Gallup.[92] John Geer notes that, "Many scholars have argued, however, that politicians must often become leaders rather than followers, since the public may be wrong in its judgement about some issues or it may not be informed on the matter."[93] He further states that Johnson tried to do this; "The President, with his mandate in hand, tried to alter what the public considered important issues."[94] Rottinghaus asserts that although much of the scholarly work on Johnson argues that he was not attentive to public opinion during his time in office, particularly with regard to Vietnam, his own research on the White House reaction to incoming public mail shows that the administration was much more attentive to public opinion. This was especially true of correspondence that favoured escalation and prosecution of the war, and Rottinghaus argues that there was a significant and direct effect on the president's mind-set and decision-making on the matter.[95] This dissertation would tend to dispute Rottinghaus's initial assumption that Johnson was extremely attentive of public opinion that went against his policy goals and objectives, especially with Vietnam. While he was inherently distrustful of the media and public opinion polls that fell within the auspices of media control such as the Gallup and Harris polls, it seems much more in keeping with Johnson's behaviour that he simply agreed with any public opinion information that echoed his own thoughts and feelings on a given situation.

Ultimately, the opinion polling that Johnson lauded in the early part of his time in office became his enemy in the later years of his presidency. As will be shown, his aides were not helpful in

[91] This is mentioned in a contemporary account of presidential press strategies; see J E Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1964), p. 120.
[92] Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, pp 159-60.
[93] Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls*, p. 7.
[94] Ibid., p. 92.
[95] B Rottinghaus, "Following the "Mail Hawks": Alternative Measures of Public Opinion on Vietnam in the Johnson White House," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), p. 387.

this regard – they would focus on bemoaning question wordings instead of the bigger picture (Johnson's data collector Fred Panzer would criticise Gallup's lack of emphasis on positive results and argue that "dramatic Johnson gains were buried under a lead about Nelson Rockefeller.")[96] The administration's use of opinion polls in times of good fortune differed immensely from how Johnson and his staff distanced themselves from the polls when they said what he did not want to hear. This can partly be attributed to Johnson's style of leadership, the already well-documented ease with which he took offence, and partly to the ways in which his staff complied.

The next section looks more specifically at where this thesis fits in with the historiography on Johnson's presidency, before concluding with a brief review of the writing on two of his most important sets of policies; the escalation of conflict in Vietnam and the Great Society programme of domestic policies.

[96] Nelson Rockefeller was then Republican governor of New York; cited in Altschuler, *LBJ and the Polls*, p. 71.

Lyndon B Johnson – the President

Altschuler and those cited in the previous section focus largely on opinion polls and the actions that Johnson took in relation to them. While it is important to comment on the administration's attitudes towards the extensive polling that was carried out and his views on the media, it is essential to look at what has been written about other aspects of Johnson's presidency, and in particular how the behaviour of journalists affected his rhetoric and actions towards the press. This section examines some of his key biographers and the significance of their work for this dissertation.[97]

Several writers have discussed Lyndon Johnson's presidency in great depth. Robert Dallek's biography focuses on his time in office and concludes that Johnson presided over, "the worst foreign policy disaster in the country's history," in the Vietnam War.[98] Dallek does concede Johnson's domestic legacy is strong: "Who among us would agree to return to the segregated world of the 1950s and early 1960s?"[99] Billington agrees with this, arguing that Johnson's domestic policy aims came from the religious beliefs that were imposed on him from childhood, though there is some question as to whether Johnson himself was a religious man.[100] Dallek's work is an important analysis of Johnson's presidency; in the context of this dissertation, his analysis of the president's

[97] A strong bibliographic review of the literature available on Lyndon Johnson's life by Kent Germany documents many of the major works published before 2009. See K. B. Germany, "Historians and the Many Lyndon Johnsons: A Review Essay," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 75, no. 4 (November 2009), pp. 1001-28. Germany is also responsible for collected editions of transcribed telephone calls from the Johnson era, which is available for use through the Miller center at the University of Virginia. For more information on this, see K B Germany, M Holland & R D Johnson (eds*), The Presidential Recordings: Lyndon B. Johnson – The Kennedy Assassination and the Transfer of Power November 1963 - January 1964* (New York City: W W Norton & Co, 2005), K B Germany, R D Johnson, G A McKee, M Holland & D Shreve, *The Presidential Recordings: Lyndon B Johnson – Towards the Great Society: February 1, 1964 – May 31, 1964* (New York City: W W Norton & Co, 2007) and K B Germany, G A McKee & D C Carter, *The Presidential Recordings: Lyndon B Johnson – Mississippi Burning and the Passage of the Civil Rights Act: June 1, 1964 – July 4, 1964* (New York City: W W Norton & Co, 2011)

[98] R Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson: Portrait of a President*, 2 vols. (New York: Penguin, 2004) p. 375. Dallek's work is available in both a larger two-volume set, and an abridged single volume. While both have been consulted, the abridged copy has been used for the purposes of this thesis, as it is more concise.

[99] Ibid., p. 374.

[100] Johnson attended churches of different denominations during his presidency. See M Billington, "The Religion of a Politician," *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* vol. 17, no. 3 (Summer 1987), pp. 519-30, for more details on how Johnson's spiritual upbringing may have affected his decision making.

waning popularity and his description of Johnson's battles with the press are as important as his explanations of many of the policies that were enacted and decisions that were taken by the administration. Robert Caro's biographical series on Johnson is of great importance to any piece of further critical writing on his life; at the time of writing, the fifth and final volume of his series has not been completed, meaning that Caro's work ends with Johnson's ascension to the presidency. Accordingly, Caro does not feature heavily in this discussion of Johnson's presidency and his media strategy during that time, but is significant regarding Johnson's early years and the development of his personal style in politics – Caro's meticulously researched history of Johnson's life gives a rare insight into the mind of the president. Caro notes that even in his early days Johnson "possessed a lash for a tongue," and a gift for "finding a person's most sensitive point, and striking it, over and over again."[101] Caro discusses Johnson's rise at great length, beginning with his apprenticeship in Washington under President Franklin Roosevelt. This period helped shape Johnson's political views – but he also notes Johnson's duplicitous nature by commenting on the rapid change in Johnson's politics following Roosevelt's death; "Before the paint had faded on the billboards proclaiming his loyalty to Franklin D, Lyndon B had turned against him."[102] Caro also notes Johnson's time as a congressman, and quotes fellow Congressman James Van Zandt (D-Pennsylvania), who summed up Johnson's style of political operation; "Johnson kept asking for favors, and he simply didn't have that many to give in return."[103] Caro does believe that Johnson knew how to work the press during his years in the US Senate; his gift for leaking to the press was "obviously natural, instinctive, innate."[104]

Certainly, Johnson continued this practice of leaking – Clark Clifford noted later that "he was a major source of information to the press – as the saying goes, 'The ship of state is the only vessel that leaks from the top,'" but the president would eventually develop an almost pathological hatred

[101] R Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, vol. 2: Means of Ascent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 57.
[102] R Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, vol. 1: The Path To Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 768.
[103] Caro, *Years of Lyndon Johnson vol. 2*, p. 130.
[104] R Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, vol. 3: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), p. 325.

of leaks from other people.[105] With that said, McGeorge Bundy remembered in 1969 that, "The poor innocent [Johnson] probably still thinks if he'd only had better staff officers, he could have traced all leaks."[106] In his final volume to date, Caro touches on the notion of Johnson's fear of failure, noting that it "all but paralyzed him in his attempt to reach for the presidency," prior to 1963, "no matter how deep his yearning for the office."[107] All of the points raised by Caro are important aspects of Johnson's personality that were carried through into the presidency; as such, his work on Johnson's path to power is of great importance in showing how Johnson's persona was moulded by his experiences, and how he would react to external pressures during his presidency. Nevertheless, Germany has noted a tendency to criticise Caro's work for reducing Johnson to a caricature, and he notes that Caro himself appears to be extremely critical of what he sees as Johnson's duplicitous personality.[108]

Several of Johnson's close aides and administrative staff have discussed their time serving under him in memoirs, and the biggest issues facing the government. Horace Busby once claimed that, "Johnson could make a grown man angry just by the way he said hello, if he wanted to, if that was his purpose."[109] Significantly, Joseph Califano, Eric Goldman and Jack Valenti, key members of staff, have talked about the experiences they had while working for him. Califano, in particular, recounts his experiences as Johnson's tenure wore on. He notes that by 1966, Johnson was "showing his frustration at being diverted from pursuit of the domestic ambitions,"[110] which were recently announced. Goldman, a former special advisor to Johnson who left office in 1966, took a similar view: "The President assumed that foreign policy was something you had, like measles, and got over

[105] C Clifford, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 430.
[106] Transcript, McGeorge Bundy Oral History Interview I, 30 January 1969, by Paige E Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, p. 11.
[107] R Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson vol. 4: The Passage of Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), p. 602.
[108] Germany, "Historians and the Many Lyndon Johnsons," p. 1017.
[109] Transcript, *Horace Busby Oral History Interview VIII*, 2 April 1989, by M L Gillette, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 17.
[110] J A Califano, Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon B Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 121.

with as quickly as possible."[111] It is interesting to note that both Goldman and Califano were on Johnson's staff in the White House and both offer the view that Johnson was not as committed to Vietnam as others have suggested. Goldman goes as far as to say that Johnson was an "Extraordinarily gifted" president, but "The wrong man from the wrong place at the wrong time under the wrong circumstances."[112] Valenti, for his part, was somewhat sympathetic to the circumstances surrounding the president's foreign policy activities in his memoirs, refusing to explicitly condemn the president for any of his decisions with regard to Vietnam.[113]

The theory put forward by this thesis is that Johnson was not able to reconcile his foreign and domestic policies. It is therefore of some significance that several close observers of the president are of the opinion that Johnson's concentration shifted significantly towards foreign policy from his initial goals for domestic reform, despite the fact that he was by nature a domestically focused president first and foremost. The argument put forward is that Johnson found himself pulled away from his preferred focus in favour of a roundly unpopular war, causing the death of the Great Society as funds earmarked for domestic programmes were funnelled into Vietnam. This guns or butter argument over which of the two was more important has been put forward by the likes of political and intelligence historian Thomas Powers as a reason why the Great Society failed; Powers notes that the war "not only absorbed the energies of the administration, but cast doubt on everything it did."[114] Gen. William C. Westmoreland, commander of the armed forces, felt that the opposite was true. He believed that Johnson's strategy of guns *and* butter actually caused issues with his Vietnam strategy; this is in interesting contrast to much of the literature put forward by scholars of the Johnson presidency such as Vaughn D. Bornet, who feel that the Great Society

[111] E F Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (London: MacDonald, 1969), pp. 527-28.
[112] Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, p. 535.
[113] J Valenti, *This Time, This Place: My Life In War, The White House and Hollywood,* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), passim.
[114] T Powers, *The War At Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973) p. 93.

suffered the most.[115] This thesis argues that both of Johnson's policies suffered due to his attempts to balance the war and the Great Society. Although his advisers and on-the-ground leaders in each sphere were fully committed to the government's objectives, Johnson's own inability to find a way to reconcile and rationalise his strategies domestically and abroad to the public and press in a consistent, complementary and proactive manner was the most important reason why both policies faltered. In other words, they damaged each other and weakened the president.

While looking at the recollections of Johnson's close associates, there are some aspects of Johnson's presidency that should be noted, specifically the relations between Johnson and his staff, which had a significant bearing on how they – and he – approached media relations. Opposing views emerge on Johnson's treatment of staff. Press accounts largely charged Johnson with having a particularly cruel and driving management style, expecting his staff to work the long hours he did and tolerating little opposition from within the ranks of the administration, whereas the response from several former staff members is strikingly at odds with both press assumptions and some other insider accounts. George Ball believed that the president was his "only friendly listener," to the dissenting view he offered the administration on Vietnam, while aide Townsend Hoopes (initially based in the Pentagon and then undersecretary of the Air Force from 1967 to 1969), described Johnson as being, "strongly allergic to opposition."[116] Jack Valenti defended Johnson passionately in a speech to the American Advertising Federation, for which he was mocked roundly in the press, but did not regret it in his memoirs.[117] He also noted that the way Johnson set up his staff led to the White House being, "a house of equals, all of whom had ample access to the president and all of whom were involved in decision making meetings."[118] Valenti was a staunch Johnson supporter, and as such his views on Johnson's flaws must be taken alongside other accounts, but there is no

[115] For Westmoreland's testimony, see W C Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) p. 411.
[116] G Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), p. 430, and Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, p. 90.
[117] Valenti, *This Time, This Place*, pp. 175-76.
[118] Ibid., pp. 173-74.

question of his value as a primary source for the inner workings of the Johnson bureaucracy. Arthur Schlesinger, the historian who worked in the Kennedy administration, fell in with those who felt that Johnson was difficult to work with. He quoted Reedy, who once facetiously remarked, "The wise senator enters cautiously, dressed in his Sunday best and with a respectful, almost pious look on his face."[119] Schlesinger was particularly critical, not only of Johnson, but of the presidency's modern role in American politics in his work *The Imperial Presidency.* He believed that Johnson's achievement with the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964 was to give the president autonomy to use the military as he or she sees fit, removing Congressional approval and increasing the autonomy of the presidency so as to be more akin to that of a king, something that Schlesinger felt was not acceptable and against the initial ideals of the Founding Fathers. Schlesinger notes that Johnson and Richard Nixon after him were directly responsible for a public loss of faith in the workings of American government. While there is an argument for identifying Johnson as an imperial president due to the large majority in the Senate and House he was able to build during his early years as president, it would be wrong to say that there were no checks or balances to his power. After the Gulf of Tonkin resolution support for his foreign policy actions would never again be so strong and, as we will see, over the course of his time in office public and political faith in Johnson eroded to the point where his continued leadership was no longer a tenable option. As such, while Schlesinger's views are important and valid in many respects, it is difficult to see how the Johnson presidency could truly be described as an imperial one.

Neustadt and May for their part felt that Johnson was a master of noticing patterns and behaviour in others, "using placement and psychology to probe personalities and trying to master them." They confirm this by quoting Johnson, himself: "I never feel really comfortable with a man unless I have his pecker in my pocket"[120] Burke and Greenstein point out that Johnson's advisors

[119] A Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (New York: Andre Deutsch, 1974), p. 181.
[120] Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, p. 205.

tested the limits of hyperbole with their characterisations of the president.[121] Joseph Califano's description of the president is a clear example of this, as he described Johnson's mercurial personality;

> Brave and brutal, compassionate and cruel, incredibly intelligent and infuriatingly insensitive, with a shrewd and uncanny instinct for the jugular of his allies and adversaries. He could be altruistic and petty, caring and crude, generous and petulant, bluntly honest and calculatingly devious – all within the same few minutes.[122]

A number of these descriptions point to a man who brooked no criticism, and, indeed, this has been the verdict of the likes of Hoopes. A statistical analysis of Johnson's interactions over the first two years of his presidency has been conducted by James Best and is interesting to note; it determines that Johnson hugely relied on trusted advisors such as Defense Secretary McNamara, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. The analysis concludes that over time, Johnson's interactions became more concentrated; "In December 1965 only 72 people accounted for 81 percent of Johnson's interactions compared with 106 people who accounted for 68 percent of his interactions in December 1963."[123] Ultimately, the anecdotal evidence provided by former Johnson staffers such as Townsend Hoopes is backed up by a statistical analysis of the president's interactions with those around him. It paints the picture of a man who became more withdrawn from the world around him as his popularity began to fail. This lends credence to the argument of this work that the administration became more adversarial towards perceived threats from the press, more inward looking and more possessive of a siege mentality wherein they convinced themselves of their own righteousness. Certainly, Johnson thrived on securing agreement from all parties involved in the decision making process. It would be easy to

[121] J P Burke and F I Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965* (London: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), p. 239.
[122] Califano, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon B Johnson,* p. 10.
[123] J J Best, "Who Talked To the President When? A Study of Lyndon B Johnson," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 103, no 3 (Autumn 1988), p. 541.

suggest as a result that, as a man who struggled deeply with criticism, Johnson filled his staff positions with like-minded individuals who would tell him what he wanted to hear. This would certainly explain why his staff closed ranks when difficulties arose with the war and public opinion slumped, but is contradicted by the likes of George Ball, who calls this portrait "two dimensional," and notes that Johnson always spoke to him with courtesy.[124] The fact remains, however, that by 1968 many of the president's staff from the early days had moved on – Ball included.

Ultimately, Johnson was indeed a consensus politician, who certainly demanded the respect and hard work of those around him, but those who worked with him have questioned the suggestion that he did not react well to criticism from his own staff. The belief of people like Cooper, Neustadt and May that Johnson made up his mind either during, or before going through the motions of, debate (rather than as a consequence of debate) seems the most likely of all the opinions offered as to how he made decisions. As a consensus politician, the president thrived on agreement, but it had to be around a policy or approach that Johnson himself already made a decision on, and he could not tolerate dissent. The assumption made by this work is more in line with Cooper, Neustadt and May – that Johnson appeared to go through the rigors of reasoned debate with his aides and staff members, but once his mind was made up on matters of policy, there was nothing anyone could do or say to change it.[125] This colours the discussion of Johnson's actions somewhat. While it is possible to criticise those in the administration who advised him on Vietnam such as McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, and those who advised him on public affairs such as his four press secretaries – Salinger, Reedy, Moyers and Christian – the final analysis must hold Johnson the most responsibility for his actions.

[124] Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 429.

[125] This assumption is made in line with the previous discussion of the likes of Townsend Hoopes and his belief that Johnson ultimately did not tolerate dissension. While George Ball, Jack Valenti and others close to the president have insisted that he engaged in reasoned debate with staff, it is difficult to argue with the discussion put forward by Hoopes, and scholars of Johnson such as Caro, Dallek and Kearns.

A selection of historiography pertaining to the Vietnam War and Johnson's Great Society will be reviewed in the following sections.

Vietnam

The Vietnam conflict is one of the most divisive and widely discussed wars in the history of the United States, and Johnson's role is one of the most intensely discussed elements. Charles DeBenedetti states that, "For Americans, the Vietnam War was most extraordinary in that it was not so much a fight against enemies abroad as it was an internal struggle over their own national identity."[126] In order to best look at relations between the Johnson administration, the press and the public during the war it is important first to cast a critical eye over the war, itself, and the historiography on Vietnam.

Johnson's role in the escalation of events in Vietnam has been hotly disputed. Some point to the role of his advisors in accelerating the conflict; indeed, Ezra Siff notes that Johnson exhibited indecision and doubts over the path of escalation, something not shared by his Vietnam advisors.[127] Siff notes the influence that long-serving Senator Richard Russell (D. – Georgia) had on Johnson, and that of his own defence advisors such as McGeorge Bundy. In contrast, Bundy's biographer, Golden Goldstein, refutes Siff's assertion that Johnson's advisors were certain of their course: "The historical record demonstrates that during his years as national security advisor Bundy was never confident that the United States could achieve a battlefield victory in Vietnam."[128] Goldstein, however, contradicts himself when he asserts that Bundy believed that "coercion would prevail."[129] Robert McNamara – the long running secretary of defence who served under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson – also contests the thesis that Johnson's advisors were especially at fault for passing on poor strategies, adding his belief that a lack of organisation from top to bottom was to blame:

[126] C DeBenedetti, "Lyndon Johnson and the Antiwar Opposition," in R A Divine (ed.), *The Johnson Years, Volume Two: Vietnam, the Environment, and Science* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), p. 23
[127] E Siff, *Why the Senate Slept: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Beginning of America's Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), p. 49.
[128] G M Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), p. 232.
[129] Ibid., p. 226.

> With the president, the secretaries of state and defense, the national security adviser, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and their associates dividing their attention over a host of complex and demanding issues, some of our shortcomings – in particular our failure to debate systematically the most fundamental issues – could have been predicted.[130]

McNamara's summary of events is that the fault for escalation in Vietnam lay with everyone, not only with Johnson or only with his advisors. Robert Dallek refutes this, and states that Johnson was in Vietnam for selfish reasons. He believes that to have admitted failure on an issue as big as Vietnam, and to have become the only American president to lose a war, was "too jarring," to his self-image as a leader who could get things done.[131] H R McMaster agrees with this analysis, summarising that President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisors committed disastrous errors in judgement: "The failures were many and reinforcing: arrogance, weakness, lying in the pursuit of self interest, and, above all, the abdication of responsibility to the American people." David Barrett believes that throughout his presidency, Johnson displayed certain common traits concerning his Vietnam deliberations, one of them being his "insistence on wrapping his advisory deliberations in a shroud of secrecy." Barrett does not believe that he had a static system of receiving advice, but that he chose to see "more or fewer advisors with significant or no formal status and representing a narrower or wider range of opinion," depending on how the war was going.[132]

A final argument considered here over how America became lodged in the quagmire of Vietnam is that Johnson was in many ways locked into a course of action when he assumed the presidency. American personnel were present in the country before Johnson came into office and Kennedy stressed the importance of containing Vietnamese communism before and during his

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[130] Robert McNamara with B Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 332.
[131] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 376.
[132] D Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), pp. 167-68.

tenure in the White House. However, David Kaiser has noted that Johnson's foreign policy differed from Kennedy's in such a way that it would inevitably lead to escalation. Where Kennedy paid as much, if not more, attention to the wider context – maintaining strategic allies, improving US relations with developing nations and holding discussions with the Soviet Union on matters of mutual concern – Johnson's approach was much more direct. Kennedy, believes Kaiser, would not have made a decision that would isolate him and his country from America's allies, something which escalation was always in danger of doing. Johnson saw no benefit to be made from what he thought would be an imitation of the Allies' appeasement policies of the 1930s.[133] Neil Sheehan appears to challenge this by stating that Johnson, "Persevered in Kennedy's commitment," when he embarked on full-scale war in Vietnam.[134] Michael Hunt recognises that Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy were all material contributors to the Vietnam situation, but concludes that, ultimately, it was Johnson's embarking on an undeclared war that would, "Prove a disaster to his presidency, to his country and to the countries of Indochina."[135] Bernstein believes that Johnson's personality was at fault, noting that Clark Clifford, another close observer, wrote that Johnson personalised the actions of the Vietcong, while Kennedy viewed Vietnam through a more detached lens. Bernstein concludes that, "The sources of Johnson's decisions to commit U.S. forces in Vietnam and to refuse to pull them out are found in his personality, and in his personal history."[136]

An important aspect of the Vietnam War in the context of this study is the debate that raged over the course of Johnson's presidency over whether the war was justified. Schlesinger feels that the decision to Americanise what Kennedy called, "their war," was a momentous decision with no precedent.[137] Levy contends that dissenters believed America was using her power and standpoint in

[133] D Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 484-86.
[134] N Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), p. 11.
[135] M H Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 108.
[136] I Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 329.
[137] Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, pp 178-79.

the world in such a way that was, "inconsistent with the principles, the values, the ethical standards of the American people."[138] Early anti-war opposition and protest was, according to DeBenedetti, subject to, "widespread popular contempt," and Johnson wondered why opposition was not overwhelmed by waves of popular anger.[139] Pulitzer prize winning Vietnam journalist David Halberstam noted as early as 1964, "Few Americans who have served in Vietnam can stomach" the idea of withdrawal, and at least during the early stages of the war, public opinion seemed to back the President.[140] "DeBenedetti's view on anti-war protests is noteworthy; he believes that Johnson did not develop any sort of strategy to deal with – or even a proper understanding of – those who opposed his policies in Vietnam. His approach to critics on Vietnam was disjointed and inconsistent, and varied depending on who was espousing the criticism.[141] This is supported by Halberstam, who concluded early on that, "Mr Johnson is a fire chief with too many blazes to put out, and too little time to worry about spots where at the moment there is only a little smoke – where the status quo is now tolerable to the United States but intolerable to the population of that country."[142] DeBenedetti concludes that the debate that overshadowed Lyndon Johnson for much of his tenure in the White House was simply a framework from which Americans argued about American commitments, and that the war always had to be about a larger purpose than Vietnam alone. Other authors have disagreed about the effectiveness and popularity of the anti-war protestors; J J Gustainis, for example, has noted that while some claim a victory for anti-war protests because their goal, American withdrawal, was – eventually – achieved, "The American public rejected the anti-war protestors' argument that the war was immoral and unjustified." The protests were not unified under one leader and were actually quite disorganised. Eventually, concludes Gustainis, average

[138] D W Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 46.
[139] DeBenedetti, "Lyndon Johnson and the Antiwar Opposition," p. 27.
[140] D Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (London: Bodley Head, 1965), p. 315.
[141] Ibid., p. 33.
[142] Ibid., p. 318.

Americans in the Vietnam period were suspicious of protest, and; "The prevailing attitudes of the mass public would have provided formidable obstacles on the path to peace."[143]

The likes of Senator J William Fulbright, whose 1966 work, *The Arrogance of Power*, denounced American involvement in Vietnam, were extremely critical of the fallout from Vietnam in the East, the West and, most importantly, at home. Fulbright argued that the war "has diverted our energies from the Great society program which began so promisingly," and criticised Johnson's "Guns and Butter" argument that America could thrive while fighting in South East Asia. Douglass Cater noted in an interview that Fulbright was unable to compartmentalise the foreign and domestic policy goals of the Johnson government at this time, and quoted him as disparaging education legislation by saying, "What the hell do I care? The war in Vietnam is killing everything anyway."[144] In his work Fulbright discussed the "facile assumption," that the money could be raised to focus on the Great Society whilst the government was also spending billions of dollars on financing a foreign war. He concluded that the war was indicative of the United States' burgeoning expansionism and argued that, if this continues unabated, "Vietnam will have had a mighty and tragic fallout."[145] Fulbright's input is vital to note – while in August 1964 he was quick to sponsor the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that gave the president the power to escalate the Vietnam conflict, he soon became one of the most powerful and influential anti-war figures in the Senate. Fulbright's early support for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution has been critiqued by William Berman, who states that Fulbright knew that something was going on that he was not privy to, and "should have been more critical than he was." The senator decided to give his support to the resolution anyway, partially because of his fear of Barry Goldwater being elected in the forthcoming elections.[146]

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[143] J J Gustainis, *American Rhetoric and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), pp. 121-22.
[144] Transcript, *Douglass Cater Oral History Interview III*, 26 May 1974, by Joe B Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 20.
[145] J W Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1966), pp. 131-38.
[146] W Berman, *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), p. 25. For more discussion of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the election of Barry Goldwater, see the next chapter.

Fulbright's views tapped into a large undercurrent of American society that was uneasy about waging war so far away and did not feel comfortable supporting Johnson's escalation in Vietnam. Fulbright's argument also connected with one of the most important debates that surrounded Johnson as president – the aforementioned guns or butter argument. As we will see, the credibility gap that began to open following escalation was one of the most significant factors in Johnson's declining popularity. The idea that America could essentially fight a war on two fronts – a literal war against the Viet Cong and the metaphorical war on poverty and injustice at home – was not easy to sell even under the best of conditions.

There is a section of Vietnam literature that charges the press with severely damaging morale amongst Americans involved in the war, from the frontline all the way up to the White House. The commander of American forces in Vietnam, General William C Westmoreland, wrote in his memoirs that after the Tet Offensive in 1968, "Press and television had created an aura not of victory but of defeat, which, coupled with the vocal anti-war elements, profoundly influenced timid officials in Washington."[147] Mark Moyar criticises the impact of award winning journalists such as David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan and Stanley Karnow, arguing that they "inadvertently caused enormous damage to the American effort in South Vietnam." He further claims that as the war went on, "they avoided reporting on American military heroism in the belief that reports of American valor would increase support for the war in the United States."[148] Robert Elegant is critical of the media's involvement during Vietnam; he believes that the media provided the "primary battlefield" and notes that, "The political pressures built up by the media… made it quite impossible for Washington to maintain even the minimal material and moral support that would have enabled the Saigon regime to continue effective resistance."[149] Nevertheless, even he concludes that reporting on the war was mainly factual and holds up when reviewed. In contrast to this view, Peter Braestrup argues

[147] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 410.
[148] M Moyar, "Halberstam's History," *National Review*, 5 July 2007, accessed on 24 June 2017 at http://www.nationalreview.com/article/221501/halberstams-history-mark-moyar.
[149] R Elegant, "How to Lose a War: Reflections of a Foreign Correspondent," in G Sevy (ed.), *The American Experience in Vietnam: A Reader* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), pp. 138-39.

that that the media's reporting, with particular reference to the Tet Offensive, was "an extreme case," and that it "veered widely from reality."[150] He concludes that television networks NBC and CBS appeared to be having, "a contest over who could shout the same words more loudly."[151] In a similar vein, traditional government wartime propaganda has been characterised as "half-hearted" by many who have looked into the matter. Bornet, who uses those very words, argues that, "Old rationales for combat proved to be threadbare in the age of television."[152] He argues that the government's own attempts to communicate through film (*Why Vietnam?,* 1965) were ineffective and the president received no help from Hollywood in the way that World War II saw dozens of pro-active and productive propaganda films, save for the, "almost counter-productive," and unbelievably patriotic *Green Berets*, released in 1968.[153]

David Halberstam noted in 1964 that, "What is more difficult to adjust to is America's indifference and ignorance, and so, many people coming back from Vietnam go through a period of bitterness during which they prefer the company of those who have been in Vietnam and know the country and care about it."[154] His analysis offers an interesting third view of the public perception of Vietnam in the earliest days of the conflict; rather than divided into hawks and doves, it was dominated by a simple ignorance of the facts of the situation. Mark Moyar confirms the validity of this analysis of the early days of the war, quoting Senator Russell telling Johnson, "I don't think the people of this country know much about Vietnam, and I think they care a hell of a lot less."[155] In support of this point, John Mueller commented in 1973 that, "The Vietnam War had no independent

[150] P Braestrup, "An Extreme Case," in Sevy (ed.), *American Experience in Vietnam*, p. 153.
[151] Ibid., p. 161.
[152] V D Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B Johnson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983), p. 265.
[153] Film reels of several propaganda films are available for view online. One notable example is a 1965 production entitled *Why Vietnam?*, which has been uploaded to YouTube by the United States Department of Defense. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZZykUr_LLQ.
[154] Halberstam, *Making of A Quagmire*, pp. 310-11.
[155] M Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 292.

impact on President Johnson's popularity."[156] Berinsky offers a differing view, claiming that public opinion of the war became polarised, and this effect increased steadily between 1964 and 1968.[157]

The idea that the American people were ignorant on the specifics of the war is worthy of note, but it would be wrong to suggest that the war had no effect on Johnson's popularity. Polls released by the likes of Louis Harris and George Gallup throughout the period of Johnson's presidency showed that there were serious issues with Johnson's handling of the war, and the credibility gap that arose as a result of the disconnect between Johnson's statements about Vietnam and his actions severely impacted on his popularity. Berinsky is correct to suggest that public opinion on the war became more polarised as Johnson's tenure went on, a finding given more weight by Rottinghaus's previously mentioned work on "mail hawks."[158] This certainly had an effect on Johnson's popularity.

Johnson's public opinion strategy in Vietnam is vital to this work; his failure to commit to a long-term strategy worked in conjunction with the issues that have been raised in this section regarding the conduct of the government during the war. A picture emerges in which the polarisation of American society during the period of Vietnam grew from the way in which Johnson's fundamental mistrust of the media and sources within the media contributed to his loss of credibility. This worked in conjunction with the administration's actions towards the Great Society reform – reforms which were proposed by the president and which were then impacted heavily by the rapidly escalating war.

[156] Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion,* p. 240.
[157] A J Berinsky*, In Time of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 115.
[158] Rottinghaus, "*Following the "Mail Hawks*,*"* p. 390.

The Great Society

The Great Society is an integral aspect of Johnson's presidency. In 1965 an incredible 83 out of 85 of his recommended measures were passed into law and at this stage during his time in office, Johnson had a higher percentage of legislation passed through Congress than any other president before or after him, something that can be directly attributed to the Great Society reforms. These included the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Higher Education Act of 1965, the 1965 Medicare and Medicaid amendments to the Social Security Act, the Model Cities Act of 1966 and the Housing Act of 1968 – legislation coming under the banner of the Great Society passed throughout his tenure in office. These reforms aimed to end poverty in the USA, increase funding towards the arts and medical care, and put a stop to racial injustice. It is important to place the Great Society in the context of the events that surrounded it. Because it was made up of a series of smaller pieces of legislation, it is sometimes easy to overlook the overarching aim. Sylvia Ellis quotes Endicott Peabody, former governor of Massachusetts, as telling Johnson he had "done too much," which is to argue that none of the monumental achievements of the Great Society stood out simply because of the scale of the legislation passed under the administration.[159] Much has been written about the Great Society in the context of America in the 1960s, and on the Great Society, when measured against Johnson's other defining policy, waging the war in Vietnam. It is sometimes difficult to detach the Great Society from Johnson himself, and the ultimate failure of much of the programme is generally argued to be because of funds being diverted to Vietnam as the war continued to escalate. As such, this section will examine the treatment meted out to the Great Society by those who wrote about Johnson with that programme to the forefront.

There has been much debate over whether the Great Society actually caused any kind of change for the better overall; Paul Conkin has concluded, "By any number of moral perspectives, our

[159] S Ellis, *Freedom's Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson and Civil Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), p. 268.

society was not so great either in 1963 or in 1968."[160] Bornet feels that failure is not easily agreed upon, and that by the 1980s there were dramatic changes for both better and worse. He concludes that Johnson's measures were certainly integral to this change.[161] It has also been pointed out that, from a public relations perspective, Johnson did not give many major addresses on some of the most important aspects of the Great Society. The fact that he gave no speeches on the economy over an eighteen month period that encompassed a large chunk of his "War on Poverty," is important to note, and something Brace and Hinckley discuss in their work on modern presidents and opinion polls.[162] Johnson himself worried at great length about the effect that war would have on his project and Arthur Schlesinger agreed, claiming in 1967, "Lyndon Johnson was on his way to a place in history as a great president for his vision of a Great Society; but the Great Society is now, except for a few token gestures, dead."[163] John Chancellor, who worked as the director of the *Voice of America* government funded news broadcaster between 1965 and 1967, viewed the entanglement of the Great Society and Vietnam as being good news for American propagandists. "It was one of the unconscious by-products of his administration that a propagandist was able legitimately to point up some of the positive things we were doing here at home. And I think in the long run this contributed to an image about the United State which was…about as good as we could get."[164]

Michael Beschloss claims in his notes to *Reaching for Glory* that there was a significant backlash against the Great Society in 1966, as the midterm elections saw large Republican gains. The future Republican president, Richard Nixon, predicted, "We're going to kill them in '68."[165] Randall Woods claims in his biography of Johnson that, "the Great Society was proving an ironic success, elevating the poor into working class and the working class into the middle class, accelerating the

[160] P W Conkin, *Big Daddy From the Pedernales: Lyndon Baines Johnson* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), p. 242.
[161] Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 250.
[162] P Brace and B Hinckley, *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 190.
[163] A Schlesinger, *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1966* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967), p. 55.
[164] Transcript, *John Chancellor Oral History Interview I*, 25 April 1969, by Dorothy Pierce McSweeny, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 17.
[165] Cited in Michael Beschloss' second volume of secret call transcripts from Johnson's presidency, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 426.

trend that began after World War II and pushing the country further to the right."[166] Robert Dallek feels that, "Johnson's domestic record is ultimately a study in paradox," explaining, "His strength as a president partly rested on his affinity for doing big things… His grandiosity led him to promise more than he could ever possibly deliver."[167] Kearns seems to agree with this summary; she felt that Johnson's descriptions of his programmes "often failed to distinguish between expectations and established realities."[168] Johnson himself would point to the 1964 election results as his mandate for the Great Society; Harris agrees that, "Johnson not only felt such social welfare extension was right, but also that this was precisely what the voters had in mind when they elected him over Barry Goldwater."[169] Clark Clifford, who replaced McNamara as secretary of defence in 1968, agreed with this summary; the landslide victory freed Johnson from "the constraints of an inherited presidency."[170] These insights, often by people who for a time were close to Kennedy or Johnson, paint the latter as someone who genuinely believed in the Great Society and tried to use the presidency to do what was right. However, authors such as Kail disagree with this thesis and paint Johnson as a pragmatist and a populist, who looked to implement Great Society policies more out of concern for his own prestige and political legacy than a desire to actually help people who needed Medicare, anti-poverty programmes or civil rights legislation.[171]

There is no argument that the Great Society was high on Johnson's agenda; Neustadt and May certainly believe that this is the case, and that domestic policy took precedence over everything else in Johnson's early presidency.[172] However, much of the literature on the Johnson presidency notes the shift that occurred as escalation in Vietnam continued, and the Great Society fell by the wayside. Those writing in the immediate aftermath of Johnson's humiliation at Tet and the advance

[166] Woods*, LBJ,* p. 876.
[167] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 375.
[168] Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & The American Dream*, p. 219.
[169] Harris, *The Anguish of Change*, p. 249.
[170] Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, p. 402.
[171] F M Kail, *What Washington Said: Administration Rhetoric and the Vietnam War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 194.
[172] Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, p. 77.

notice he gave of his departure from office found that the Great Society was ruined by his pursuit of American supremacy in Southeast Asia. Tom Wicker thought in 1968 that the President threw away "the fruits of his great victory for some unattainable goal, as Roosevelt had done in trying to pack the Supreme Court."[173] This is indicative of several scholarly views on the matter; Bernstein called Johnson's idea of a country that could, "do both," war and peace, "an empty promise." Bernstein concludes that the president's "preference for guns over butter would bring calamity to Lyndon Johnson and to the United States."[174] Donald Kettl has argued that Johnson battled for the Great Society in the face of a widening war, and was, "A President caught in his dreams, unable to control his destiny, and in the end he was destroyed by this conflict."[175] In this case, there is something of a split; the likes of Bernstein appear to believe that Johnson was more focused on Vietnam, while Kettl is in the school that believes that Johnson was much more interested in domestic policy reform, and previous quotations from Califano and Eric Goldman further illustrate this point. Johnson's frustration over being diverted from his domestic ambitions was beginning to show as early as 1966, and Goldman's belief that Johnson thought of foreign policy as one of the worst aspects of the leadership role he inherited is telling.[176] It is true that Johnson's rhetoric regarding domestic reforms was sometimes lost to concerns over Vietnam; for example, notes Bornet, an important announcement on crime in February 1968, received far less attention than it deserved, because of tension over the rapidly developing Tet Offensive and the media coverage it was receiving.[177]

[173] T Wicker, *JFK and LBJ: The Influence of Personality Upon Politics*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1970 [1st pub. 1968]). It is worth noting that Tom Wicker was a journalist for the *New York Times* during the 1960s – his reporting is of great significance to this work.
[174] Bernstein, *Guns or Butter,* p. 542.
[175] D F Kettl, "The Economic Education of Lyndon Johnson: Guns, Butter, and Taxes," in Divine, ed., *Johnson Years*, vol. 2, p. 74.
[176] Califano's beliefs and Goldman's quote "The President assumed that foreign policy was something you had, like measles, and got over with as quickly as possible," are previously noted, from Califano, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 121, and Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon B Johnson*, pp. 527-28.
[177] Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B Johnson,* p. 248.

Conclusion

The objective of this literature review was to view several aspects of the Johnson administration, as well as outlining the theoretical basis of several concepts underlying the analysis that this thesis will provide. This has included factors that determine the effectiveness of propaganda, the impact of the media in public opinion, and the ways in which and the extent to which polls can be used as true indications of the public's views. Johnson's presidency was profoundly influenced by his interactions with the media and public opinion polling, and his difficulties in both respects are noted. In this section, Johnson's presidency has also begun to be evaluated, along with the policies that he enacted – in particular those involved in the Great Society and Vietnam, through an overview of Johnson scholarship.

The proposition of this dissertation, based on close examination of literature concerning Lyndon Johnson, a selective and detailed analysis of aspects of contemporary media coverage, and archival research undertaken primarily at the Johnson Library, is that Johnson's ultimate failure lay in the "selling" of his strategies, rather than in the strategies, themselves. Ellis sums Johnson up as "a complex, multidimensional figure who was a committed pragmatist with an 'all things to all men' character."[178] This thesis would not dispute this summary; Johnson was indeed a consummate pragmatist who succeeded in politics in no small part due to his ability to think on the spot and react to events in the correct way. The following chapters will put forward the argument that this was not the case when it came to dealing with the press and controlling the flow of information through the White House. Johnson failed to construct an effective strategy to manage press and public interaction and control his presidential image, and his pragmatic nature was ultimately more of a hindrance than an asset in this respect, even as it allowed for his success in other areas, such as the passage of civil rights legislation. The inability to do this was a direct contributor to the failure of his credibility, and it has been important to show the views of other authors and commentators who

[178] Ellis, *Freedom's Pragmatist*, p. 262.

have already offered their interpretations as to why his presidency failed. The consensus, offered by a wide variety of authors cited in this review, is that Johnson simply could not have his guns and his butter – that the president put too much into Vietnam and the Great Society suffered as a result. This work offers a variation on this summarisation; the major failing was that the president could not – and, in several cases, would not – accurately convey to the American people the true goals and objectives behind these policies. Johnson's inability to do this cost him the invaluable quality of appearing to have integrity – a quality that he successfully projected early in his presidency. Ultimately, this undermined his leadership and severely diminished the benefit that he intended his domestic programme should bring to the United States.

It is clear to see that the president did not fully understand the media's characteristics, leanings and functions in a capitalist western democracy, despite Caro's assumption that he was a master of leaking information to the press. This alone does not prove expertise, and the president clearly failed to find a way to pro-actively sell his policies to an increasingly sceptical press and public, which meant that by the definition of propaganda offered at the beginning of this chapter he failed to manipulate the opinions of his targeted group.

Chapter 2: 1963-1964 – Assuming and Consolidating Power, Campaigning for Election

While this thesis aims to look principally at Johnson's elected presidency, from 1965 through 1969, it is still important to look at the first year of his time in office. In his memoirs, Press Secretary George Reedy proclaimed that, "Lyndon B Johnson was a far better president in the period when he was filling out the Kennedy term than when he occupied the White House in his own right."[1] It is from this year that the foundations of Johnson's campaigns and strategies were being built, and two of the most important aspects of this project saw their beginnings in 1964. The Great Society was categorised and introduced prior to the start of the 1964 Presidential campaign, and the Gulf of Tonkin incident evolved into something that would eventually lead to escalation in Vietnam. With these events in mind, alongside the election campaign that would dominate the latter stages of the year, 1964 was a vital year in the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. This chapter will look at the forced transition of power from Kennedy to Johnson at the end of 1963 and how the incoming President handled this. It will describe how several important events of 1964 were conceptualised by the administration and how information was delivered to the public as a result. 1964 saw the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August, several important presidential addresses such as the State of the Union address in January and a commencement speech at the University of Michigan in May, and an election campaign against the Republican Barry Goldwater in November that consumed much of the administration's time in the latter half of the year. This chapter will look at the early period of Johnson's relationship with the press and public opinion polls; important figures such as George Gallup will be introduced and their importance explained.

Lyndon Johnson was no stranger to political division during his time in Washington, and this certainly did not change when he entered the White House. The transition from Kennedy to Johnson was a potentially slippery one – Kathleen Turner agrees that the President would later "Come under

[1] G Reedy, *Lyndon B Johnson: A Memoir* (New York: Andrews and McMeel, 1982), p. 135.

fire," for his actions on November 22nd, 1963,[2] and Johnson himself would later say that, "For millions of Americans I was still illegitimate… a pretender to the throne, an illegal usurper."[3] His predecessor, the well liked and media friendly John F. Kennedy, was assassinated in office and Johnson was sworn in as president on Air Force One, on the way to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. The speed of his succession to the presidency could have attracted large-scale criticism. Johnson's political profile as "Master of the Senate,"[4] was that of a shrewd politician, who was not above manipulation and bullying to further his own agenda, and it would not have been out of the question for this image to be invoked in contemporary reviews of his actions on the day. However, given the circumstances of the event and the fact that Kennedy's assassination happened in Johnson's home state, he realised the need for swift action and that he should remove himself from Texas in case there was still some threat against his own person. He also felt that there was a need to be decisive and not allow a break in the leadership of the country. This is evidenced by his call to the treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, Richard Maguire, just hours after being sworn in; "We're in the same family," said Johnson, "and one thing I know he would want us to do is to carry on – be effective – and that's what we're going to do."[5] This exemplifies the swift, decisive and pro-active opening to his Presidency – he was rightly convinced of the need to offer stability to a country which was stunned over the sudden and violent loss of John F Kennedy, and which was on the verge of being thrown into turmoil. Even this first act was a potentially divisive one; his rush to assume leadership could have been seen by some – noted by Turner – as proof of Johnson's thirst for power, the consummate politician eager to assume what he felt was his rightful place. Others agreed that his decision was correct; such was the alarm caused by his predecessor's assassination it

[2] K J Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 40.
[3] As recounted to biographer Doris Kearns in Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p. 170. This biography is an important primary source of material on Johnson's thoughts, beliefs and explanations of his actions in office.
[4] This term has been used by multiple authors to describe Johnson's political ascent in the Senate – most notably as the title of vol. 3 of Robert A Caro's biographical series on Johnson. For more information, see R A Caro, *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon B Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
[5] Telephone call from Johnson to Richard Maguire, 9.10pm, 22 November 1963. Transcript from M R Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 21.

was necessary for Johnson to assert control over the situation and assuage the mounting panic. Despite some dissenting voices, Johnson maintained a 79% approval rating in December 1963 according to pollster George Gallup.[6] This is important to note – despite the feelings of some commentators, and indeed Johnson's own musings, he held a strong sway with the public in the immediate aftermath of the Kennedy assassination – far from being seen as an illegal usurper, he was in fact a credible replacement for his fallen predecessor at an absolutely vital time for the nation. In the first months of his time in office, however, he would endure several challenges, not least from the press.

His early relationship with the press, according to Turner, was one that was fraught with difficulty. Johnson eschewed Kennedy's well-organised and planned press conferences in favour of chaotic and disorganised events and short notice conferences; this caused general difficulty for the White House press corps that threatened to turn on him from the beginning of his time in office. As early as 1 December, Johnson called Walter Lippmann, a veteran columnist for the *Washington Post*, whose career had begun during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, to organise a meeting and "bum a drink" from the newspaperman.[7] He also conducted an extended conversation with the president of the *Washington Post* Company, Katherine Graham, an old associate of Johnson's, in which he cleverly asked Graham to call out politicians who were against civil rights legislation and blocking a vote on the matter: "Front page. In and out. Individuals, needed to be targeted."[8] From these two examples it is clear that Johnson's strategy was aggressive; he held press conferences while walking across the White House lawn, or during barbecues at his Texas ranch, creating logistical difficulties for reporters who were expected to follow the President and be present for impromptu press events. Partly as a result, Turner believes that as early as the spring of 1964, Johnson, "Already

[6] Memorandum from Fred Panzer to B Marvel, 12 September 1967, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, box 405, p. 1, Lyndon B Johnson Library, Austin, Texas [hereafter referred to as LBJ Library].
[7] Telephone call from Johnson to Walter Lippmann, 5.46pm, 1 December 1963. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, p. 80.
[8] Telephone call from Johnson to Katherine Graham, 11.10am, 2 December 1963. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, pp. 81-85.

experienced a honeymoon, a falling out, and a reconciliation with the press."[9] White House journalist Helen Thomas seems to dispute this, claiming that Johnson actually had, "a big honeymoon. He had a long one," but from looking at the evidence on offer, particularly the *TIME Magazine* reporting from April, it would seem that there were indeed some difficulties between president and press in the early months.[10] This early turmoil is important to note and comment on; for all of the good press Johnson received following his assumption of the presidency the previous November, it was important that he continued to court the press and maintain a positive public profile moving through his first year in office. This was particularly true given that an election loomed in the latter stages of 1964.

This is an early example of one of Johnson's marked variances from the Kennedy style, one that would eventually hinder him. Where Kennedy was a polished, media-savvy Easterner who seemed at ease in front of the camera, Johnson was none of these things. He was a Southerner; more at home in a small crowd and less comfortable in front of a camera; rather uneasy at the idea of forming relationships with journalists and notoriously thin-skinned. An infamous incident in 1965 saw Johnson call up CBS President Frank Stanton following a negative report from Vietnam correspondent Morley Safer, telling Stanton, "Yesterday, your boys shat on the American flag," and asking if the network was "Trying to fuck me?"[11] This is indicative of Johnson's inability to keep a lid on his relationship with the press; reports that he disagreed with would often be met with angry tirades. Johnson and Stanton were actually much closer than his tirade would suggest, and the president was in regular communication with him at various times throughout his presidency; in

[9] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 70. Kathleen Turner has written extensively on LBJ's relationship with the press, particularly in relation to Vietnam.
[10] Transcript, *Helen Thomas Oral History Interview I*, 19 April 1977, by Joe B Franz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 18.
[11] Halberstam's anecdote in *The Powers That Be* (1979), cited in Mitchell K Hall (ed.), *Vietnam War Era: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), p. 140.

February 1964, they discussed LBJ's idea that the *New York Herald Tribune* was trying to get him discredited, and discussed the possibility of leaking by the Johnson staff.[12]

Regardless of his personal feelings, this kind of behaviour towards journalists and the sense of paranoia concerning leaks was unbecoming of a President, even one known for his "earthy" Texas upbringing and language. Early in his tenure Johnson showed a distinct inability to adapt to both the office and the pressures that came with it – George Ball remarked in his memoirs that the press felt he had, "Little skill at concealing often crass political motives and methods."[13] This inability to adapt would be instrumental the tremendous downturn in credibility that the President would later endure. For now, however – during his first six months in office – the President enjoyed a certain amount of leeway with the press. While the White House press corps grumbled over Johnson's poor scheduling and ill-timed conferences, he still received largely positive statements from the media, who seemed to heed his calls for national unity in the early weeks of his time in power. His personal intervention headed off a railroad strike in April, and his proclamation of success was strong, provoking positive coverage and a good reaction in the opinion polls published in ensuing weeks.[14] Johnson previously scored a 73% approval rating from George Gallup on 11 March[15] while a Presidential trial heat – a practice poll carried out by the Gallup pollsters in which the sitting president was put up against potential candidates from the other political party – on 18 March saw him winning over both Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge with 68% of the popular vote. A Harris poll conducted for *Newsweek* and released on 7 April showed Johnson being preferred over any

[12] Telephone call from Johnson to Frank Stanton, 6 February 1964. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, pp. 222-26.

[13] Numerous authors have referred to Johnson's Texan style of speech and language, and the president was known to be occasionally vulgar particularly in private or when discussing institutions such as the press. Ball's description of Johnson's earthy qualities is taken from *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), p. 319.

[14] This issue made headlines in 1964 – see, for example, J D Pomfret, "The Railroad Settlement: A Triumph for Mediation," *New York Times*, 27 April 1964, accessed on 3 August 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/1964/04/27/the-railroad-settlement-a-triumph-for-mediation.html?mcubz=0.

[15] G Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1869 – it is important to note that while the date of the poll's publication is several weeks after the incident, polling took place within days of the address – between 28 February and 4 March.

Republican candidate – particularly Henry Cabot Lodge, who he led by 52% to 33%.[16] The discrepancy in poll results is likely to be due to the differing methods and sample groups used by Gallup and Harris; Harris polls tended to be less friendly to Johnson, although still extremely heartening at this point. This early goodwill and success did not, however, make him immune to potentially dangerous media coverage; a *TIME Magazine* report on 10 April entitled, "You're Fun, Mr. President," described a car ride with Johnson in which he flouted the Texas speed limit and drove with a cup of beer in one hand. An infamous quote from the article from one passenger; "That's the closest [House of Representatives Speaker] John McCormack has come to the White House yet,"[17] exemplified the reaction to the story of an irresponsible President going wild just months after the death of his predecessor. The Associated Press ran a story on 11 April showing off Johnson's good-humoured "clowning" with reporters and his cabinet from the previous day.[18] In parts of the press were less amused and Johnson was rebuked in some quarters. *TIME*, a publication of some stature, published a letter from Republican gubernatorial contender Jack Crichton, rebutting its assertion that Johnson's great ally in Texas politics Governor John Connally had no serious opposition.[19] As editorials chastised Johnson for his recklessness, his reaction, according to Turner, was to move away from joking with newsmen and "retreat into presidential dignity;"[20] eschewing his enjoyment of Presidential power, at least in public, and attempting dissuade public opinion from the idea of an unintelligent and buffoonish Texan occupying the Oval Office. Johnson's private reaction was to criticise the White House press to George Reedy, saying in a telephone call; "This crowd here – you've got to understand that they're not the masters of the White House. They're just the servants and we give them what we want to give them."[21] Another story, which cast Johnson in a

[16] Associated Press, "Poll Shows Lodge Ahead of Nixon," *Minneapolis Star*, 7 April 1964, p. 7.
[17] *TIME Magazine*, 10 April, 1964, p. 24. With no vice president, following Johnson's succession to the presidency, the speaker was next in line to the Presidency.
[18] Associated Press, "Chief Clowns With Newsmen and Cabinet," *La Crosse (WI) Tribune,* 11 April 1964, p. 1.
[19] Crichton's letter, reading simply, "Sir: Your statement that Governor Connally faces no meaningful Republican opposition [May 15] is in error," was printed in *TIME Magazine*, 29 May 1964, p. 15.
[20] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War,* p. 68.
[21] Telephone call from Johnson to George Reedy, 7 April 1964, 11.50am. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, pp. 307-308.

poor light, was that of his alleged abuse of his pet beagle. On 27 April, Johnson lifted the dog, named Him, up by the ears. The image appeared in newspapers across America alongside an article by Doug Cornell of the Associated Press that invited widespread criticism from animal rights campaigners. Johnson was indignant, asking Reedy what the "son of a bitch," Cornell looked like and demanding that the White House give him, "The silent treatment," for a while.[22] These are further examples of Johnson's private mistrust of the press, which was nascent even in the early months of his Presidency and which would never leave him.

[22] Telephone call from Johnson to George Reedy, 28 April 1964, 7.07pm. Transcript from M R Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, pp 329-330.

An infamous image of LBJ lifting his beagle, Him, by the ears in Chicago on 27 April 1964.
Photograph by Yoichi Okamoto, courtesy of the Lyndon B Johnson Presidential Library.

Nevertheless, these stories came just prior to Johnson's first great announcement of his tenure, the unveiling of the Great Society, and the President did not see any fallout in terms of his polled public opinion. George Gallup's Presidential Trial Heat poll from 13 May was nothing if not decisively pro-Johnson,[23] and was undoubtedly buoying news for the President, undermining the criticisms that were levelled at him. In the early part of the year, then, Johnson experienced a rocky relationship with the press – and Turner's analogy of a honeymoon period following his assumption

[23] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1879-80.

of power followed by a quick falling out and then reconciliation in the early part of 1964 is perhaps the most accurate way to describe his troubles. On this occasion, he was able to find strategies to overcome the issues that started to grow between him and the press corps. His decision in April to remain strictly Presidential would have far reaching consequences, however, and his temperamental attitude towards the journalistic profession remained intact. This ensured that any strategies he put into place were an exercise in short termism; he scored a victory in terms of positive press coverage in the early part of 1964, but the underlying issue of his fundamental mistrust of the fifth estate still remained and Johnson did not seem to want to deal with this.

In the political arena, the first year of Johnson's Presidency saw him push forward with several of President Kennedy's policy objectives in an attempt to stabilise the country and build a platform for his own election at the end of 1964. Principally, he was instrumental in the passing of civil rights legislation, which formed one of the cornerstones of his most important domestic policy push – the Great Society. The last weeks of 1963 and the first half of 1964 were essentially spent trying to bring a sense of balance to the troubled nation; it was important to ensure the growth of previous years would not be threatened by Kennedy's death. The President's State of the Union address in January 1964 was a sombre affair in this regard. He emphasised civil rights legislation and asked that the plans of John Kennedy be put in motion, "Not because of our sorrow or sympathy, but because they are right."[24] Johnson further evoked Kennedy's legacy by asking Americans to fulfil Kennedy's "Great faith," in them by working for "A world free of hate." He outlined several of the policies that would become key aspects of the Great Society. The war on poverty was announced, something which would become a recurring theme throughout the year and indeed the Presidency as a whole, by calling Americans to arms and stating that "The richest nation on Earth can afford to win," the battle. There was another call to arms on the subject of race – Johnson reminded the country that American soldiers of all races stood together in Berlin and Vietnam, and asked why they

[24] L B Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," 8 January, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26787.

could not do so at home. This was an important speech, coming at the start of an election year. It was vital for Johnson to maintain his connection with Kennedy and his assassination, while also commencing the process of breaking out of his predecessor's shadow – to do any less would be to undermine his credibility as a leader in the upcoming elections.

This was not the only reason that it was imperative for the President to give a strong State of the Union address. As the nation continued to grieve for his fallen predecessor only weeks after his death, Johnson had to show that the nation was moving forward, and could continue to do so under his leadership. While it was necessary to show deference to Kennedy, and politically prudent to do so, given that Kennedy's advisors and staff still populated the White House[25], it was also important to show that Johnson was the man to lead the country forward. It is pertinent to note as well that at the start of an election year it was necessary to leave a good impression on the public early, something to build on in the coming months as campaigning would begin. In a telephone conversation with the columnist, Drew Pearson, Johnson noted that he received "Eighty one applauses, in 2,900 words," and that, "It was a twenty five minute speech, and it took forty one, because of the applauses."[26] In his own head, this amounted to vindication of his ideas and plans as well as his commitment to continuing Kennedy's policies, and he felt that this gave him a remit to continue forward and implement these throughout the rest of 1964.

The press, for their part, agreed. Walter Lippmann reported the next day that, "In style and in substance the President's message is an intimate and personal display of the political gifts for which Lyndon Johnson is celebrated."[27] By the end of March, the pollster Louis Harris noted in his syndicated column that, "Johnson has been enjoying the best of all political worlds," when discussing the popularity of the president in the South, but noted that Johnson would need to give assurances

[25] Significantly, Robert Kennedy had remained in his post as Attorney General and would do until he ran for Senate later in the year, and other figures such as Press Secretary Pierre Salinger had stayed on to assist the incoming president. Salinger would leave office in March 1964, to be replaced by George Reedy.
[26] *Telephone call from Johnson to Drew Pearson*, 8 January 1964. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, p. 153.
[27] W Lippman, syndicated *Washington Post* column, in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 January 1964, p. 27.

to many African American voters from that area.[28] Johnson would attempt to do exactly this, most notably by initiating the Great Society, his grand scheme to leave his mark on the office of the Presidency and better the lives of the American people.

The first six months of 1964 were most notable for the launch of the Great Society programme and the way in which the administration instilled it in the public consciousness. The first speech to incorporate elements of this objective was given in Chicago on 23 April, at a fundraising dinner for the Democratic Club of Cook County, where Johnson called for America to build, "A Great Society of the highest order."[29] This speech was well received by the party and enhanced the President's credibility, even with bitter political rivals such as Attorney General Robert Kennedy. He watched the speech on television and said, "That was terrific,"[30] to Johnson during a telephone call later that evening. Johnson began to pepper his speeches with talk of the Great Society, mentioning it once again at an address given the University of Ohio in Athens on 7 May 1964. The President was clearly gearing up for an election campaign. In Athens, he discussed the problems facing America – disease and poverty, needless killing and bills that he wanted to put through but were being debated by Congress at the time – the Appalachian Bill, the Poverty Bill and the Civil Rights Bill, all of which made it through the process and were passed into law. Johnson concluded this speech by asking Americans to help him to build the Great Society.[31] This was an important speech; introducing into public view one of the expressions for which he would become known throughout the rest of his Presidency. Johnson's next interaction with university students would bring his next proclamation regarding the Great Society, at his more famous address in Michigan two weeks later.

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[28] L Harris, "The Harris Poll: Johnson Rates High With Negroes, Southern Whites," *Pocono Record* [Stroudsburg], 28 January 1964.
[29] L B Johnson, "Remarks in Chicago at a Fundraising Dinner of the Democratic Club of Cook County," 23 April, 1964. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, eds., *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26184.
[30] Telephone call from Johnson to Robert Kennedy, 23 April 1964, 10.50pm. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, pp. 326-27.
[31] L B Johnson, "Remarks in Athens at Ohio University," 7 May, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26225.

Johnson used the term again during a speech to graduating students at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, on 22 May 1964. For the first time Johnson set forward at length in public his domestic intentions and goals for his Presidency, and brought them all under the umbrella of a single name. This speech kicked off an ultimately very successful election campaign that centred on the Great Society, urging the American people to go, "All the way with LBJ."[32] Johnson used this speech to call on Americans to use the prosperous era they were going through to their advantage; the post-war boom had still not subsided and the call from the government was for "Quality, not quantity."[33] He elaborated on what he envisioned the Great Society to be, and the three areas that most embodied his ideals; the classroom, the cities and the countryside. Further reforms to the educational system were mentioned. He discussed pollution, the need to ensure that America's countryside is not spoiled and his hope that the United States would remain a beautiful nation. Statistics were given about overpopulation of urban areas, and how this trend would continue to grow – Johnson stated the need for America's cities to become great once more. The early 1960s saw unprecedented growth in American industry and Johnson wanted to use this to both his and the country's advantage.

Philip Taylor calls propaganda a, "process for the sowing, germination and cultivation of ideas,"[34] and it can clearly be argued that this description applies to Johnson's Great Society speeches. Johnson attempted to position himself as an honest and hardworking American interested in helping the people by building his Great Society. By sloganizing his campaign promise, he drew himself in with previous Presidents who were associated with their own ideals and public works programmes: Kennedy's "New Frontier," Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" and even Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom" had all become important campaign mottos and the Great Society was the president's attempt to join his predecessors. Roosevelt's New Deal was particularly influential on

[32] LBJ's campaign slogan in 1964 was spread throughout the country – a simple slogan which encouraged Americans to help him follow through on his intentions. See Appendix A for an example.
[33] I Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 17.
[34] P Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 2.

Johnson, who came up through the political ranks during Roosevelt's time in office and was considered to have been an ardent "New Dealer." It was important for Johnson to have a strong campaign slogan of his own, especially at this period in time – with the importance of television in politics increasing, it was vital for Johnson to be able to say and do the right thing whenever he was in the spotlight. In this case, Johnson was able to capture the public's imagination with his proclamation. One reaction to an early draft sent in to the White House proclaimed that the un-named reader, "Got into the Michigan speech – and couldn't stop."[35]

Even in the early days of his Presidency, Johnson relied on a strong writing team to evoke the imagery he wanted to put across in his speeches. In Ann Arbor's case, a lot of work was put into the words he would say. The University of Michigan, itself, provided suggestions and background information[36], as did Jim Fitzpatrick of the Young Citizens for Johnson group.[37] The speech was clearly being taken seriously by the administration. Behind the scenes, a large team of aides digested the background information and thoughts of younger Democrats to come up with something that would appeal to the voting youth. Speechwriter Richard Goodwin coined the phrase, "Great Society," and Jack Valenti, a senior aide, suggested that it be put to use. As a short, snappy phrase that would be endearing to the public and comparable to other democratic Presidents and their own policies, the Great Society was a great propaganda tool. Johnson wanted something that could elevate him in the eyes of the people and make them see him in the same way as they saw his political hero, Franklin D Roosevelt, and the Great Society was something that could be compared to FDR's "New Deal" of the 1930s.

[35] Memo from unnamed source to Jack Valenti, "Remarks at the University of Michigan" file, undated, Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 106, LBJ Library.
[36] This material referenced previous years' speeches and activity at the University, none of which made it into the final draft. Memorandum from Michael Radock to Bill Moyers, 8 May 1964, "Remarks at the University of Michigan" file, Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 106, LBJ Library.
[37] Fitzpatrick's contribution was to strongly urge the president to use the speech as a platform to promote Youth Volunteer provisions of the Poverty Bill. This was overlooked in favour of a more general call to arms against poverty. Memorandum to Jack Valenti and Bill Moyers from Jim Fitzpatrick, 12 May 1964, "Remarks at the University of Michigan" file, Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 106, LBJ Library.

Johnson knew what he wanted from his speechwriters, and generally trusted that they would provide him with strong, newsworthy, speeches. Vaughn Bornet agrees that his influence is at the heart of the speeches written for him; "Richard Goodwin's edited words and the brainstorming of task forces cannot be added together to equal the inner reaches of Johnson's mind, emotions and soul."[38] It was vital, particularly at this stage with an election campaign looming, for Johnson to be earnest, believable and strong without the aid of others, and the evocative and emotive language used throughout both speeches were supposed to invoke, "A special moment in time when many things seemed possible."[39] The speech at Ann Arbor seemed to go a long way to achieving that goal; support for the President appeared to be high in the immediate aftermath of the event. A "Presidential Trial Heat," poll published by Gallup on 13 May and researched in late April, three weeks after the Ann Arbor address, showed respondents choosing Johnson over potential Republican nominee Governor George Wallace of Alabama at a rate of 84% to Wallace's 9%. Gallup's breakdown of the results even indicates that Republican respondents vastly preferred Johnson.[40] While it looks damning for Wallace, this statistic must be treated with apprehension – the elections were still more than six months away and George Wallace was far from the strongest of Johnson's potential opponents – but still indicates the popularity of the man in the weeks immediately following the unveiling of the Great Society. For a moment, the polls made it seem that Johnson had managed to cross the political lines and create a partisan series of reforms. His political record over the next year would back up this assertion; the vast majority of his policies would pass with little or no opposition and he was unmatched by previous Presidents in this regard.

At this stage then, it is clear that Johnson still carried a sturdy sense of gravitas. He received some of the strongest approval ratings ever seen in a President and made a clear statement of intent to lead the United States into further prosperity. The death of John Kennedy and Johnson's subsequent decisive actions engendered a wave of goodwill in the American public that did no harm

[38] V D Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B Johnson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983), p. 102.
[39] Unger, *The Best of Intentions*, p. 19.
[40] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, pp. 1879-80.

to his chances of election in 1964. This is backed up by the public opinion polls that were carried out on a monthly basis by the newspaper pollster George Gallup. Gallup was a pioneer in public opinion polling and his polls were nationally syndicated in several large newspapers such as the *New York Times*. Throughout 1964, these polls favoured Johnson – when he gave his State of the Union Address in January the Gallup Poll showed him carrying the highest approval rating he would ever receive; 80% approval and just 5% disapproval from the random sample audience.[41] By the time of his speeches in Athens and Ann Arbor, this dropped to 75%, with 11% outright disapproving of his policies.[42] The opinion poll results continued to slowly slide for the rest of the year – a lower 69% approved of Johnson by December, with an 18% disapproval rate.[43] This number would eventually be shown on a graph created by Louis Harris, showing the decline of Johnson's popularity moving into 1967.

It is interesting that Johnson's approval rate was sliding even before the United States entered Vietnam – this was largely the trend throughout the Presidency and it was only towards the middle of 1968 that the slipping popularity rates arrested. This is not uncommon however – Sparrow notes that instances of high presidential approval rates are actually relatively rare; he feels that this shows that the media are complicit in the president's ability to speak for the public with his actions.[44] It is widely held that the war was one of the main reasons for Johnson's fall in approval. While this is certainly the case, it is also clear that there were other reasons for the beginning of the decline. Johnson was not John Kennedy – his image and politics were wildly different from his predecessor and as Johnson moved away from the Kennedy administration's goals and began to implement his own, his popularity naturally began to fall. Where Kennedy had the charm and charisma needed to appeal to the voting public in the new age of television, Johnson insisted on

[41] Memo to Fred Panzer from B Marvel, 12 September 1967, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, box 405, LBJ Library, p. 1.
[42] Ibid.
[43] L Harris, "Decline of Johnson's Popularity," *New York Times*, 8 October 1967, copy in Office Files of Frederick Panzer, box 403, LBJ Library.
[44] B H Sparrow, "Who Speaks For The People? The President, the Press, and Public Opinion in the United States," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4 (December 2008), p. 589.

maintaining a rigidity and what he took to be a "Presidential air,"[45] especially following the disastrous *TIME Magazine* coverage of April. As we will see, this did not actually help his standing with the public, especially as his approval fell much more drastically in the latter years of his Presidency.

As it was, Johnson's ratings fell at a slow, but steady, rate following his entry into the Oval Office, and certain things must be noted about the early slide. Clearly, an 80% approval rating would be impossible to keep up indefinitely for any elected official. This is the kind of consensus that is simply unheard of in American politics and Johnson's initial approval ratings were sky high as a result of the forced transition from Vice-President. His early push for stability and harmony temporarily unified Americans and it simply could not last forever. Overall, this was an expected change as the realities of the two-party political system set in following the appeal for unity after Kennedy's assassination and Americans slowly returned to their political allegiances. Johnson's big ideas and rabble rousing talk of eliminating social problems such as poverty and disease was undoubtedly exciting and won him a lot of support. However, the more conservative members of the voting public would certainly have been put off by his plans to use federal power on projects such as the Appalachian Bill, and this may also have contributed to the slight decline in his popularity. The kind of voters who remained sceptical of the New Deal and its benefits certainly did not appreciate Johnson, whose ideas took their lead from Franklin Roosevelt's foundation and whose Presidency embodied New Deal liberalism. Over the next four years, his approval would slump as low as 40% in the Gallup Polls[46] and spark a crisis behind the scenes of his administration.

[45] Several commentators have noted the difficulty that often beset the president in his public appearances. His aides spent a lot of time beseeching him to show more of himself and less of what he thought the public wanted. Drew Pearson, a columnist and newspaperman active since 1925, noted in 1969, "He was trying too hard. On television if you're not able to relax you're no good at it. He was better at it when he carried the microphone around on a neck chain." See Transcript, *Drew Pearson Oral History Interview I*, 10 April 1969, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 14. This will be discussed in further detail in later chapters.
[46] A Gallup Poll published on 26 November 1967 showed Johnson's approval rating at 41%. His popularity in the East was all that kept him above an overall sub-40% rating at this time. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2091.

Nevertheless, his first year in power saw Johnson hold impeccable public approval and a high amount of credibility in the eyes of the public – that much is clear. , Johnson continued to be a strong and credible presence in domestic politics, his early intimations on his plans for office and the decisive way in which he assumed control of the presidency from John Kennedy were apparently working in his favour. His next challenge would be to maintain his popularity and credibility through to the November Presidential elections, whilst dealing with domestic and foreign issues such as the Gulf of Tonkin problem of early August.

The disputed Gulf of Tonkin incident, in which North Vietnamese forces allegedly attacked two American vessels patrolling international waters off the coast of North Vietnam, would lead to a resolution being passed into law on 7 August that allowed the President to act with impunity on the matter of Vietnam and send troops into the country without declaring war. A brief discussion of the Gulf of Tonkin incident is necessary; while the questions over the credibility of official accounts from the area largely proved the government's version of events to be false in later years, the fallout from this decision would create vocal and high profile opponents of the US response. Johnson himself would later note to George Ball that, "Those dumb, stupid sailors were just shootin' at flying fish!"[47] Regardless of the veracity of the events of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, it is important to discuss the immediate fallout of the event, namely the South East Asia Resolution, commonly known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This would serve as the basis for escalation of the Vietnam War, from supporting the South Vietnamese to outright US-led war in the region.

The Resolution was pushed through by LBJ and announced to the public in a televised speech on 4 August, before it was passed. He called an impromptu press conference the previous day to update reporters on the state of play in the Gulf of Tonkin, noting that additional forces had been sent to the gulf, "with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it."[48] The resolution almost unilaterally gave Johnson the authority to use conventional military force in

[47] Ball, *The Past Has A Pattern*, p. 379.
[48] *Department of State Bulletin,* 24 August 1964, p. 259.

Southeast Asia without an official declaration of war, essentially allowing the United States to informally conduct a war against the North Vietnamese without officially being involved in a conflict. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution passed with few critics in the first instance – Senators Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) and Ernest Gruening (D-Alaska) were the only representatives not to vote in favour of the Resolution, leading to its passage with 88 votes out of 90, and the House of Representatives did not see a single congressman vote against it. M. A. Ball reports that Johnson's televised announcement of the attack at 11.36pm on 4 August "dramatized the decision makers' explanation of the event, reporting action taken and underlining the need for a congressional resolution."[49] That day was a confusing series of events, which saw the President's speech delayed from 9pm for over two hours as he was advised to wait until US retaliatory bombings had begun before making his announcement. The administration was already distancing itself from the consequences of their actions, reports Ball – Rusk commented that, "They [The North Vietnamese] bring it on themselves." Ball concludes that with regards to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the President and his advisors created a "Linguistic cocoon," which "Protected them from different versions of the event and from evidence and arguments which ran counter to their interpretations."[50] This is a theme that would become prevalent as the administration ran on throughout the 1960s – in this case, the administration, Johnson and key advisors appear to have used rhetoric to convince themselves that their course of action was correct. Regardless of both opposition from Morse and Gruening and of the consequences of their actions, Johnson and his policy makers decided to push forward with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which would become more important as his tenure wore on. Ball's argument, that Johnson and his advisors used an ostensibly innocuous event to their advantage with the use of language and emotion to draw in the listening public, is important to note here. What is described is an early example of members of the administration essentially burying their head in the sand, and moving forward with a strategy that they felt was for the best, without properly consulting

[49] M A Ball, "Revisiting the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis: An Analysis of the Private Communication of President Johnson and his Advisors," *Discourse and Society*, vol. 2, no. 3 (July 1991), p. 286.
[50] Ibid., p. 288.

with the public and other important sources. At best, it shows an alarmingly short-term viewpoint from the President of the consequences of his actions, something that would become a theme as his term in office continued. However, it is worth mentioning that the events of the Gulf of Tonkin incident happened in quick succession, and it is difficult to tell from the official documentation how much information was relayed to Johnson and his close advisors. A telephone conversation between Secretary of Defense McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk on 4 August noted that the information they received suggested three unidentified boats and three unidentified aircraft approaching US ships, alongside reported torpedo fire.[51] It would later be revealed, as per Johnson's comments about flying fish, that this was incorrect information. It is therefore easy to understand how difficult decision-making was for Johnson and his staff at this time.

With that said, the events of early August were also an example of Johnson using circumstances to his advantage to push through legislation without any significant opposition, both in the emotive language that he used to stir up the people around him and more importantly in the language he used to describe the event to the nation. His discussion of the matter at Syracuse University on 5 August was littered with such terms as "Wilful and systematic aggression,"[52] and repeated his televised remarks from 4 August in which he discussed, "Aggression by terror."[53] This emotive language galvanised opinion against North Vietnam and allowed Johnson to move forward with the blessing of the public. Lerner believes that the blame for public ignorance in Vietnam during this time should be laid at the feet of the American people, arguing that, "Americans were too preoccupied with domestic problems to pay close attention to Johnson's statements about a small

[51] Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], *1964-1968, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964*, doc. 275, 4 August 1964.

[52] L B Johnson, "Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin," 4 August 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26418.

[53] L B Johnson, "Remarks on Vietnam at Syracuse University," 5 August 1965, Recording accessed online on 1 October 2017 from the Miller Center at https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-5-1964-remarks-vietnam-syracuse-university.

Asian nation which many had never even heard of."[54] This is an example of Johnson using the credibility and popularity that he attained at this stage in his career to further his foreign policy goals, and a pro-active strategy towards maintaining a strong public image in the run up to the election. Ball describes the administration's wish for a congressional resolution; Johnson and his advisors prepared for the moment, having a draft speech and resolution made before events forced their hand. Senator Gruening later wrote, "Can we, therefore, conclude that the 'Unprovoked' attack against United States naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin was anticipated more than two months before it took place?"[55] Gruening makes the point that Johnson and his advisors knew what path they wanted to take, and though his question was aimed at the validity of the reports themselves, it also asks the question of whether Johnson was always committed to the path of escalation that he would eventually take. Gruening concluded that he was, and this is backed up by Kathleen Turner who notes that the perfect time to push such a resolution through Congress is immediately following "Attempts to torpedo an American naval vessel."[56] However, regardless of criticism from the two senators, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was a perfect propaganda victory, at least in the immediate aftermath of the event. Even Senator Gruening himself later admitted that the decision to escalate was played down to the public: "With consummate public relations skill, even as an experienced magician diverts the attention of the audience away from where the action is taking place."[57] Johnson successfully managed to manoeuvre through what could have become a tricky situation at an important time for the President. A contemporary account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident written several years after Johnson left office concluded that, "The people had been angered by Hanoi's audacity and pleased by the President's response."[58] Ultimately, McMaster's summary of the situation, that Johnson, "succeeded in creating the illusion that the decisions to attack North Vietnam were alternatives to war rather than the war itself," is the most telling one when it comes

[54] M Lerner, "Vietnam and the 1964 Election: A Defense of Lyndon Johnson," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, (Fall 1995), p. 764.
[55] E Gruening and H Beaser, *Vietnam Folly* (New York: National Press, 1968), p. 250.
[56] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 84.
[57] Gruening and Beaser, *Vietnam Folly*, p. 240.
[58] T Powers, *The War At Home* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), p. 14.

to the public opinion side of the Vietnam conflict.[59] The Resolution may have been an exercise in short term thinking and would cause Johnson problems in later years, but for now the President could mark the potentially dangerous situation as a victory for his image.

The resolution itself would have far-reaching consequences – as noted, it allowed the President to take action on a much larger scale in Vietnam, essentially opening up the floor for the escalation into all-out war that would happen over the next twelve months. This culminated in Johnson's 1965 speech at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, which announced the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam from military advice and support to a more direct involvement with the South Vietnamese army and their war against the North. Hotly disputed by the aforementioned Senators Morse and Gruening, the resolution would only increase in notoriety as the war went on. F. M. Kail has called the period of the resolution's drafting, "The most spectacular events in Vietnam in 1964."[60] The Gulf of Tonkin incident saw one piece of long-term thinking from the administration; a weekly summary of the public's view on Vietnam began on 6 August, and would not end until December 1968. This summary was circulated around Johnson's top advisors and the president himself, and showed, "the subject and disposition" of mail sent to the White House.[61] It is also important to note that the Gulf of Tonkin brought Vietnam into view at a vital point in the political year – as the presidential election campaign was moving towards a conclusion. It was important for Johnson to remain firmly in control of the situation, while at the same time abdicating himself from the responsibility of taking a country into a foreign war just before the American people were to vote on his future in the Oval Office. He smartly televised his press conference announcing the retaliatory bombings at 11.36pm on 5 August. As previously touched

[59] H R McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 326. A general in the United States Army who has since served as an advisor to President Donald Trump, McMaster also levels harsh criticism at the ranking Joint Chiefs of Staff for not providing a successful or decisive plan of action for Vietnam, either to pacify the Viet Cong or to win the conflict against the North Vietnamese.
[60] F. M. Kail, *What Washington Said* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 184.
[61] This is described in detail in B Rottinghaus, "Following the "Mail Hawks": Alternative Measures of Public Opinion on Vietnam in the Johnson White House," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), p. 370.

upon, this was partially done for operational reasons; it was important not to divulge the location of American troops to a live audience until it was no longer possible to stop their mobilisation. However, the timing was also important in that many fewer people would see the speech and therefore fewer people would notice the ramifications of his words – he could have waited until the following day to make the announcement but chose not to for this reason.[62] This is an example of an intelligent public relations strategy that the administration employed during 1964; it was clear that this action had the potential to cause disruption and this tactic, while simple, ensured a smaller and more receptive audience for the President's announcement. The approach seemed to work; there was little negative reaction in the press – the *New York Times* noted on August 6 that Johnson had made it clear he did not want a wider war, and said, "the President himself has enunciated…firmness, a firmness whose mission is peace."[63] It is interesting that the defining media coverage of the event was one of support towards Johnson; the potential for misuse of executive power was strong with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution – the president could now unilaterally escalate the situation in Vietnam as he saw fit. Two Gallup Polls conducted between 6 and 11 August and published several weeks later predicted that not only would Johnson take 65% of the vote against his Republican opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona)[64], but that 71% of those polled thought he was, "Handling affairs in Vietnam as well as could be expected," with only 13% of the respondents feeling that he was doing badly.[65] Given that these polls were taken during the period that the Gulf of Tonkin discussions were ongoing and the event was fresh in the national consciousness, it is fair to say that Johnson still held a remarkably strong approval rating – alongside positive coverage of the event It is clear that his tactics worked. At this point of the year he was still a strong, decisive and most importantly, credible leader to the general public. As the election campaign moved forward, it would be prudent for the President to continue to look strong and

[62] See J Galloway, *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970), p. 69.
[63] "Wider War," *New York Times*, 6 August 1964, p. 28
[64] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, pp 1898-99.
[65] Ibid, p. 1899.

credible in front of the nation. Ultimately, however, the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was, "a search for the quick fix," and no amount of shrewd selling to the public could change the fact that when escalation did inevitably occur, the Johnson administration left itself open to accusations of having misled the public about its intentions in Vietnam.[66]

Johnson's campaign strategy for the 1964 election merits discussion; as Johnson's difficult relationship with the press was continuing and the rhetoric of the Great Society began to permeate the public consciousness, it was important for him to continue his momentum into a strong election campaign. His re-election was rarely in doubt; Gallup polls throughout the year pitted him against the various possible candidates, examples including Richard Nixon, Henry Cabot Lodge and Barry Goldwater, and he never dropped below 60% of the popular vote.[67] Eventually, Goldwater was chosen by the Republican Party to oppose Johnson. Goldwater was a hardline candidate, who ran as a law-and-order candidate, emphasising the need for stronger policing at home and a much tougher stance on Vietnam. Johnson outmanoeuvred Goldwater at every turn, and began working early to ensure that Goldwater's credibility would not rival his own. On 5 June, he ordered Richard Goodwin to remove any trace of Goldwater from a speech he was due to make to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in New York, citing his reason as not wanting to build his opponent up.[68] This refusal to even acknowledge Goldwater – the final speech made no mention of the man, reminiscent of FDR's virtual silence on Alf Landon's candidacy in 1936[69] – showed the Johnson campaign was not willing to come up against the Goldwater campaign in a war of words. Johnson himself wisely looked to keep away from making comments that could be deemed as childish against his presidential opponent. In another example of Johnson's ability to politically outclass his opponent, race riots that occurred in Harlem in July were a potentially tricky situation for the

[66] Unnamed Johnson advisor, quoted in Galloway, *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*, p. 99.
[67] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, pp. 1880-2010.
[68] Telephone call from Johnson to Richard Goodwin, 5 June 1964, 12.58pm. Transcript in Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, p. 384.
[69] Lyndon B Johnson, "Remarks in New York City to Members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union," 6 June, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26296.

President to handle, and something that Goldwater could have exploited to his advantage as the law and order Presidential candidate. In order to head off the danger, Johnson invited Goldwater to a meeting at the White House and planted a reporter at the event to ask him if he planned to use the subsequent meeting to broker an agreement with Goldwater not to exploit the sensitive issue of race in the coming elections. Johnson responded affirmatively, and Goldwater was effectively backed into a corner, with no choice but to agree to the deal.[70] This was a strong example of Johnson's shrewd political ability. He used skills honed from decades of experience in the Senate to ensure that Goldwater could not take advantage of an area that was identified as potentially weak for the incumbent President. However, planting a reporter to ask a pre-set question was not a tactic that Johnson could use regularly; given both his relationship with the press at large and the danger inherent in manipulating a journalist to political ends, being caught doing this would have greatly damaged his credibility.

Johnson's campaign also focused on painting the Goldwater efforts as dangerous and extremist. The infamous "Daisy" advert, aired just once by the campaign, showed a young girl counting to ten followed immediately by a countdown to zero as the camera zoomed in on the girl's face, ending in a nuclear explosion. President Johnson's voice, misquoting the poet W. H. Auden, proclaimed that, "These are the stakes; to make a world in which all God's children can live, or go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die."[71] This advert was a landmark in both political and advertising history – one of the first examples what would later become a standard practice of smearing the opponent via television advertisements. Johnson successfully tapped in to the fears of the electorate over Goldwater's hard line stance on Vietnam; the advert asked the question of whether the people trusted the Republican with the full power of America's nuclear arsenal. The thesis on propaganda of French philosopher, theologian and resistance fighter, Jacques

[70] See Powers, *The War At Home*, p. 19.
[71] See advertisement on YouTube, accessed on 3 August 2017, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Id_r6pNsus. In the poem, *September 1, 1939*, Auden wrote, "…We must love one another or die. …"

Ellul is especially relevant here.[72] In order to function correctly, propaganda needs to have a base in the popular culture of society; it works best when throwing simple information quickly at the user. In this case, the easy-to-understand ideological statement being made was that Barry Goldwater made an unsuitable candidate for the presidency because he was a dangerous extremist who could not be trusted with the power that was inherent to the office. The advert, and subsequent adverts, pointed to Johnson as the candidate of peace, and the Johnson campaign went further, accusing Goldwater of inconsistency, particularly in terms of war. One commercial claimed that Goldwater said he would, "Drop a low yield atomic bomb on the Chinese supply lines in North Vietnam,"[73] which, when taken with the "Daisy" advert, is clearly supposed to indicate the instability of Goldwater and his dangerous tactics. The closing statement for each advert was, "The stakes are too high to stay at home;"[74] this was clearly intended to juxtapose Johnson's peace against Goldwater's supposed militancy and push a high voter turnout for the President. Johnson became the man of peace, the candidate who would not escalate commitment in Vietnam and who would work to keep American soldiers from being deployed half way across the world in the name of political idealism. The difficulties faced by the candidate in this regard were pointed out as early as 9 January by Walter Lippmann – he believed that Goldwater, "did not relish," his placement as the more extreme candidate, but further argued that, "Senator Goldwater would… transform the party of Lincoln into the party of white supremacists. He would transform the party of Theodore Roosevelt into an Anti-Progressive Party of uncontrolled and unregulated businessmen, each man for himself."[75] Ultimately, Goldwater's own divisive beliefs were as much his undoing as Johnson's well fought presidential campaign. Matthews notes that Goldwater's "unrestrained style and uncompromising philosophy," as well as his "inept management of foreign policy during the campaign," caused

[72] J Ellul, *Propaganda* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), pp 165-66.
[73] Transcript in W L Benoit, *Seeing Spots: A Functional Analysis of Presidential Television Advertisements* (New York: Praeger, 1999), p. 41.
[74] Transcripts of several Johnson advertisements, each ending with this slogan, ibid., pp. 35-51.
[75] W Lippmann, "Goldwater Runs Against His Own Party," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), 9 January, 1964, p. 6.

significant problems for his camp, but there can be no doubt that the tactics used by Johnson – especially the "Daisy" advert – were very effective in bolstering support for an LBJ presidency.[76]

On 21 October, Johnson commented that, "We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."[77] Like many of his actions in 1964, this statement would come back to haunt him following his election. As early as 13 August a draft memorandum from the president's national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, discussed "the necessity of prompt retaliation especially for attacks on our own forces." A memorandum the following day from General Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised that even more serious measures might be required due to the seriousness of the situation in South Vietnam.[78]

For the moment, Johnson's campaign was working exceptionally well. Gallup polls released on the same day as the "American boys" quote indicated that Johnson held 63% of the voting public[79], with 6% of people undecided. A final Presidential trial heat on 2 November showed Johnson coming in with 64% of the vote against 7% undecided[80] – Goldwater appeared to lose popularity in the final week before the election, partially to Johnson and partially to indecision.[81] Johnson's credibility as a leader was strong going into the election on 3 November; Goldwater was painted as a poor choice and a potentially unsafe person to hold the highest office in the land, and Johnson was riding high on the wave of popular opinion. A landslide majority would elect him President in his own right, sweeping the Republican Party aside and ensuring the complete success of the transition

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[76] J J Matthews, "To Defeat A Maverick: The Goldwater Candidacy Revisited, 1963-1964," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, (Fall 1997), p. 673.
[77] Lyndon B Johnson, "*Remarks in Memorial Hall, Akron University,*" 21 October, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26635.
[78] See Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant For National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964*, doc. 313, 13 August 1964, p. 673 and T Powers, *The War At Home* (New York: Grossman, 1973), p. 316.
[79] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1906.
[80] Ibid., p. 1907.
[81] The polling for the final survey carried out several days after Johnson's proclamation of 21 October provides a barometer of the effect that this had on his already abnormally high poll ratings.

that began almost a year previously; from John Kennedy's understudy to a popular leader in his own right.

Nevertheless, Johnson's strategy again showed signs of short-term thinking. In looking for a way to win the election quickly and decisively, he and his staff pushed against Goldwater's law-and-order phraseology and positioned himself as the candidate of peace. As we have already seen, the Johnson administration knew that the Vietnam War was likely to escalate; his officials' actions in drafting a resolution that allowed them to initiate offensive actions in the country months before Tonkin shows this much. Johnson seemed to be reticent about the idea of escalation in Vietnam, and George Ball – who served as one of the few doves in Johnson's staff meetings[82] – wrote of this; "President Johnson… was as anxious as Kennedy to avoid an irreversible embroilment. At every stage, he moved reluctantly – pushed by events and the well meant prodding of the same men who counselled President Kennedy."[83] Ball argued that the need for consensus politics meant that Johnson wanted his backroom staff wholly in agreement before moving forward. This is disputed by some of Johnson's former staff members – former National Security staff member Chester Cooper believes that Johnson would make up his mind even as he went through the motions of debate, essentially rendering continued discussion moot. In the case of Vietnam, this was especially relevant. Cooper believed that, "It suited his purpose and style to give the impression that he was engaging in a lengthy and thorough appraisal in which all points of view were advanced and weighed."[84] The reality is most likely to be somewhere between the two; Johnson was hypersensitive to criticism and wanted people to respect, believe in and agree with him, leading to his push for consensus, but he also had a tendency to want to forge ahead with his own ideas, something which would become clearer as his presidency developed. For the time being, however, he at least gave the sense of wanting to engage debate, even as key advisors such as Robert McNamara recommended escalating

[82] Stanley Karnow notes that Ball later resigned. See Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (London: Century, 1983, p. 506.
[83] Ball, *The Past Has A Pattern*, p. 379.
[84] C L Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: The Full Story of U.S. Involvement in Vietnam, From Roosevelt to Nixon* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1971), p. 285.

the war – as secretary of defence, McNamara felt it was necessary to show American strength and avoid a potential military confrontation with the major communist powers in Beijing and Moscow.[85]

Clearly, with all of this going on in the background, it was a wildly short sighted public relations policy to denounce Goldwater for intending to escalate the war even while advisory staff as important as McNamara counselled for an increased presence in Vietnam. Courtney Brown suggests that new voters played a significant role in the landslide election, and notes that while most areas of the United States were able to get behind Johnson; the Deep South did not, suggesting that voters in that part of the country did not resolve the "electoral dilemma," posed by Johnson and Goldwater.[86] On the face of it, Johnson's strategy in the election was strong, and brought hugely successful early results alongside the largest winning margin in electoral history in the presidential election. Johnson's campaign was ultimately successful and the president easily remained in office once the results were in. As strong as the campaign was, it showed little foresight in terms of the potential for escalation in Vietnam even as Johnson and his advisors knew that escalation was likely if not inevitable and even became counter-productive in the way that it lay the foundations for the credibility gap which would threaten to destroy his integrity in later years.

It is important however to note that Goldwater was not completely unsuccessful in his campaign. Berman points out that he won 27 million votes and took five states against the unprecedented strength of Johnson's campaign, sowing the seeds of later challenges to consensus politics and the Great Society.[87] Goldwater's campaign was indicative of a new wave of American anti-communist, pro-religious conservatism of the type that Senator Joseph McCarthy had successfully taken advantage of in the 1950s and that Richard Nixon would eventually use to propel

[85] McNamara further discusses the reasons for his support of gradualisation and escalation in an oral history interview with the Lyndon B Johnson Library. Transcript, *R McNamara Oral History Interview I*, 8 January 1975, by Walt R Rostow, p. 27, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.
[86] C Brown, "Nonlinear Transformation in a Landslide: Johnson and Goldwater in 1964," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 37, no. 2 (May 1993), p. 609.
[87] W Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998[1994]), p. 5

himself into office at the end of Johnson's term in the White House.[88] The 1964 election constituted what Black and Black have termed a "Great White Switch," in voting patterns in the southern states as Goldwater easily bested Johnson in the region, and they further note that since 1964 more whites have voted for Republican candidates in every election, although they also note that the most significant shift in alignment to the Republican party did not occur until Ronald Reagan's presidency sixteen years later.[89] Certainly, ominous signs of resurgence in conservative views at a grassroots level would become more common as Johnson's elected presidency wore on, but it is difficult to measure what, if any, effect the Johnson administration had on the continued rise of conservatism over the course of the rest of the decade, just as it is difficult to ascertain exactly what effect this had on the administration's attempts to reach out to the public and deal with the press during the 1960s.

As 1964 drew to a close, the President had every right to bask in the success of his election win. The margin was the largest in US election history – 16 million votes separated him and Barry Goldwater, and Johnson could now drive forward with his domestic mandate, sure that a consensus was built. The Gallup Poll registered Johnson's approval rating at 69% on 18 December[90], and in a less political poll he finished as the winner of Gallup's Most Admired Man, which was released on 30 December[91], ahead of former President Dwight Eisenhower, Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King. On the face of things, Johnson's year was an excellent one – his handling of the election campaign, the introduction of the Great Society and the support that this enjoyed and his recovery from some initially sceptical press reporting were all been great achievements. Johnson was certainly a credible choice to lead the nation at this point, but the underlying issues had already begun to show themselves. Despite enjoying some respectable headlines throughout the year,

[88] For an interesting and informative view on the transformation of anti-communist though during the immediate postwar era, see J L Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 33-38.
[89] E Black & M Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 205
[90] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1911.
[91] Ibid., p. 1912.

Johnson's distrust of the press – and the press corps' opinion of him – remained largely unchanged since the early portion of the year. While he changed his strategy towards press conferences and courting the press, there remained an underlying view from some sections that the President was an attention hungry Texan buffoon. McNamara describes the "ridicule," that Johnson received for turning the White House Lights off to underline his commitment to increasing governmental efficiency and expenditure.[92]

Pushing through the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was hailed as a political victory, a successful plan several months in the making, which would make it possible for the President to order strikes against North Vietnam more readily. Johnson's handling of the November elections was strong from a short-term point of view – an easy dismantling of Goldwater with well-timed and damaging assaults on his character. But Johnson did not take on board the ultimate cost of Vietnam, and the risks involved in allowing the public to perceive in his campaign a costly and awkward commitment to keep the peace in Vietnam. The long-term viability of Johnson's strategy was in doubt, even as he chastised Goldwater with the "Daisy" advert as a dangerous man or even an extremist, who would escalate tensions in South East Asia and commit American troops to areas where they were not required. Discussions over the growing need to do exactly that in Vietnam were already happening behind the scenes in the Johnson administration. While it would not have been prudent for Johnson to reveal intimate discussions of strategy to the public, it was equally poor strategy for him to contradict Goldwater's assertions so vehemently while the possibility of escalation remained on the table. This could only lead to severe criticism from members of the public who were against escalation and their counterparts in the press. This short-term strategy towards the media and public statements would continue throughout the Presidency, and this view of Johnson's first year in power shows that the seeds had been sewn for problems with legitimacy and strategy further down the line. The following year would see Johnson's elected presidency begin in earnest as the Great

[92] McNamara oral history interview 1, p. 22.

Society began to take shape, and as the escalation that was threatened in Vietnam for so long finally occurred.

Appendix A – An image of Johnson's campaign slogan for the 1964 election used on a promotional badge.

Chapter 3: Guns vs. Butter: Escalation in Vietnam and the March of the Great Society

1965 would prove to be a pivotal year for Johnson, particularly in terms of his perception of the press and their role within his administration. With his election campaign out of the way and his term in office for the next four years assured, the president was now able to move ahead with his own policies. 1965 was to be the year of the Great Society, and Johnson's main goal this term was to push through the legislation that he had promised since coming into office – Medicare and Medicaid, the anti-poverty bill and others were all to be passed this year, and Johnson's domestic legacy would hinge on how well the Great Society worked. The shadow of Vietnam hung over the administration, however, and the Pleiku attacks of February that led to escalation would prove to be the beginning of one of the most divisive conflicts in the history of America. Johnson would announce the escalation of the conflict in April, and the first military drafts took place in the following months. Anti-war tension escalated throughout 1965, and culminated in the self-immolation of two men in November. Overall, 1965 would be something of a tipping point for Johnson, and a year in which he could not allow the escalating events to move ahead of his ability to deal with them.

This chapter examines Johnson's interactions with the important events of 1965, and how the administration developed public relations strategies to move forward. It will look at how Johnson favoured short-term, popularity boosting measures to improve his standing with both the public and the media, and how Johnson and his staff continued to pursue the press and public relations objectives that worked well during the post-Kennedy months and his election campaign. This was ultimately a short-sighted strategy which heavily contributed to the decline in his credibility; this chapter will assess the extent of that decline throughout 1965 and ask whether or not it could be said that this truly occurred, beginning with his first major public engagement of the year, his State of the Union address in January.

The State of the Union address in 1965 was of tremendous importance; it was Johnson's first major address since the election and he needed to ensure that he struck a presidential tone, as well as outlining his plans for the coming year, without causing his poll levels to drop and a loss in public confidence. Presidential aide Bill Moyers was in charge of collecting data from the various departments along with their suggestions as to important information for the President to deliver to the nation. For example, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall pushed for a paragraph on the environmental legacy that the Johnson administration wanted to forge. Udall's suggested wording[1] is present, though modified, in the final speech. Johnson's advisors and speechwriters worked hard to strike a balance between foreign issues; specifically the ongoing American involvement in Vietnam and the domestic plans that involved the Great Society. The speechwriting staff members were also keenly aware that their efforts would be vetted by several departments before anything was finalised.[2] A memorandum sent from long-serving Johnson aide Horace Busby to the speechwriter Richard Goodwin on the address discussed the importance of striking a "Johnsonian tone"[3] from the beginning of the speech, and stressed that, as a consensus politician Johnson should be looking for, "an applause line," to bring observers to his side quickly. This should be noted; as previously discussed, Johnson was developing a style of interacting with both the media and the public that had been moulded partially from his bruising fights with the press in the first few months of the presidency in 1964. He wanted to ensure that the crowd was alongside him from the moment

[1] Memorandum from Stewart Udall to Bill Moyers, 2 January 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box no. 136, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library [LBJ Library], Austin, Texas.
[2] An undated draft of the speech sent from Richard Goodwin to the President at the LBJ ranch indicates this – Goodwin left the speech at a high word count so that others could add and remove facts as they pleased. Located in memorandum from Richard Goodwin to President Johnson, undated, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box no. 136, LBJ Library.
[3] Memorandum from Horace Busby to Richard Goodwin, undated, Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," box no. 136, LBJ Library, p. 1.

he started speaking, and to this end even had one of his assistants, Juanita Roberts, record the length of applause that he received for each point that he made during the speech.[4]

Domestically, Busby looked for Goodwin to include a sweeping statement, which would sum up the President's goals, and would be both easy to understand and underline how well the country had flourished in recent years. This would help Johnson's popularity by underlining the commitments that were being made to the Great Society. A phrase similar to what was outlined in the memorandum made it into the final draft; Johnson would discuss how, "Our flourishing progress has been marked by price stability that is unequalled in the world."[5] Overall, Busby felt that the message should not offer a final declaration of the President's plans but would offer instead "glimpses and hints into the future,"[6] staying true to the campaign promises of 1964, but also allowing for Johnson and his people time to work out the specifics of each Great Society plan as and when necessary. This was an intelligent public relations strategy; becoming too involved in the minutiae of the Great Society risked alienating the American public, something that Johnson could not afford to do at this early stage.

On Vietnam, national security advisor McGeorge Bundy counselled a firm stance. His congratulatory memorandum to Bill Moyers on the day of the address stated that he was very happy with what had been written, but that the section on Vietnam was "the most dispensable paragraph."[7] His memorandum to the President on the same day suggested that the secretary of defence, on the other hand, was worried that the statements being drafted were too heavy handed on the subject of intervention. Bundy thought McNamara was worried that if stronger actions in

[4] Memorandum from Willie Day to Johnson, 4 January 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box no. 136, LBJ Library – this memorandum was sent alongside a copy of the text of the address showing each area of stoppage and the length of applause.
[5] Lyndon B Johnson: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," 4 January, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26907.
[6] Memorandum from Busby to Goodwin, op cit, p. 3.
[7] Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to Bill Moyers, 4 January 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," box no. 136, LBJ Library.

Vietnam were not intended, then Johnson might regret the stance he was taking, and wanted to ensure that the president was given both points of view.[8]

The number of people who were asked to read drafts of this address is important to note; it is indicative of Johnson's consensus style of politics and his wish, at this point in the Presidency, to be inclusive and open about his goals. Moyers was instrumental in bringing the speech together and sent a request to over 40 government departments in November; responses and appeals from areas as diverse as the Atomic Energy Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission were stored away and used by Moyers and the speechwriting team as and when needed.[9] Moyers was also able to satisfy Johnson's need for emotive language to galvanise public opinion – a request from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) to change the word, "poison," to, "polluting,"[10] in the national agenda section of the speech was roundly denied, as[11] it was felt the imagery generated by the original wording was much more likely to engender support for the President's public works plans. As much as it was important for Johnson's ideal of consensus politics to gain as much information as possible for the state of the union address, it was also vital to give the public a strong indication of where the President wanted to take his policies over the coming year. As his first address since the election – coming even before his inauguration, which would take place the following week – Johnson had to give a strong performance and his aides ensured that he was provided with this reassurance. Playing to Johnson's mistrust of the press and the previous difficulties between the two camps, the White House produced a spot check of newspaper reports on the address on the day after it was released. Choice quotes from 26 local and national newspapers, including the *New York Post*, which claimed that, "Mr Johnson not only described a

[8] Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," box no. 136, LBJ Library.
[9] Undated 50-page document, "State of the Union Suggestions," in Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," box no. 136, LBJ Library.
[10] The President said, "I propose that we increase the beauty of America and end the poisoning of our rivers and the air that we breathe." From Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, op cit.
[11] A memorandum from HEW sent to Bill Moyers on 2 January with several recommendations has simply been marked "No" on this point. See Memorandum from Secretary of Department of Health, Education and Welfare to Honorable Bill D Moyers, 2 January 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box no. 135, LBJ Library.

vision, he outlined concrete goals. They represent, he acknowledged, an agenda, not detailed proposals." The *Miami News* declared, "The American people last night saw the full scope of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society for the first time."[12] Johnson needed to have press coverage reported to him for the same reason that he needed to have his applause recorded; as a President who was not yet secure in his place amongst his peers, and who was still privately struggling against the shadow of the Kennedy family, it was important for him to be able to see the acknowledgement of those around him, particularly from areas of the press who were critical of him in previous months. Johnson's insecurity is further underlined by a memorandum that was passed to the President from his secretary, Dorothy Territo, several days after the State of the Union; it detailed *New York Times* reporting of each annual address since 1933, noting where the paper had discussed details of reaction from spectators. Notably, Johnson's 79 interruptions for applause was easily the highest number, eclipsing the 57 interruptions received by Dwight D Eisenhower in 1953.[13] This is further indicative of Johnson's almost compulsive need to know that he was being well received, and indicates the extent of his difficulty in accepting critical newspaper articles and the challenges faced in bringing the press with him to support the administration's agenda.

The State of the Union was something of a propaganda victory for Johnson with which to bring in the New Year. *The New York Times* reported that his decision to move the address to 9pm represented a strong understanding of government and current affairs, and allowed him to increase his audience by twofold or even more.[14] The report also strongly congratulated the President on his ability to address the camera, and therefore the people, who it was important to reach out to. With this in mind, he was able to show his policies off to the people without being bogged down by specific aspects of any one of his many campaigns. He managed to give the impression of a coherent

[12] Dispatch #291: "Editorial Support for President Johnson's State of the Union Address is Widespread," with "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 135, LBJ Library.
[13] Memorandum from Dorothy Territo to President Johnson, 9 January 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," 4 January 1965, box no. 136, LBJ Library.
[14] J Gould, "TV: Johnson Talk at Night Welcomed," *New York Times*, 5 January 1965, p. 67.

program of reforms through which he wanted to use to push the country forward into the latter half of the decade and beyond. The Associated Press released an article, syndicated nationally, containing a statement from press secretary George Reedy, who noted that the president received, "an unusually large number" of telegrams and described Johnson as being "gratified" with the response to his message.[15] The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* released an article that claimed the president was praised by congressional representatives from both parties. Though it noted Republican concerns over the costing of the program, Speaker of the House John W. McCormack (D-Massachusetts) was quoted as calling the speech, "truly a great message," and House Republican leader Gerald Ford (R-Michigan) believed that, "the ultimate goals set forth in the President's address are the goals of all Americans."[16] A poll released by George Gallup on 21 February, conducted several weeks after the State of the Union address between 28 January and 2 February, cited Johnson's character and experience as the most likeable qualities of the man, with his policies on poverty, Medicare and civil rights all scoring comparatively highly on the list.[17]

The State of the Union address played its part in these ratings; Johnson's manner had been well received by the public and the mandate he put forward, which took the Kennedy policies he ran with in 1964 and made them into his own, was well received. Only 4% of Gallup poll respondents felt that Johnson wanted to spend too much, and only 7% were unhappy with his handling of the civil rights bill, which was well within tolerance for a country that had experienced as much racial turmoil as the United States in recent years. Louis Harris published a poll on January 18 that argued Johnson actually increased his share of approval since he took office in 1963, comparing a 69% approval rating with 63% in November 1963. Nevertheless, Harris ominously noted in his syndicated column that the number of people with negative views actually increased from 4% to 27% in this time, and 8% of negative commenters remarked that Johnson lacked integrity – the largest negative aspect of

[15] Associated Press, "Telegrams Pour In," *Fresno Bee* (Fresno, CA), 5 January 1965, p. 4B.
[16] Post-Dispatch Wire Services, "State of Union Speech's Goals Widely Praised By Lawmakers," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch (*St. Louis, MO*),* 5 January 1965, p. 2A.
[17] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1925.

his personality.[18] With positive press on his side and a strong public opinion base on which to build, Johnson held his credibility through this address. The strategies of his administration paid off – as Busby suggested, he set goals without being too specific, and the organisation of Moyers helped to deliver an impressive speech which combined rhetoric and strong forward planning to set forward the agenda for 1965. This is a strong example of what Johnson was able to achieve when he and his administration were able to come up with a pro-active, well-reasoned and intuitive strategy for dealing with a public occasion. Having utilised his staff to the best of their abilities and having listened to the ideas of key members of the administration, Johnson was given a mandate to move forward with his plans by the reaction to his second State of the Union address. With this mandate in hand, Johnson moved on to his next public engagement; the inaugural address of his elected Presidency on 20 January.

The President's inaugural address was strongly influenced by Ambassador Chester Bowles, who had been posted to New Delhi by the President. Having been asked to draft a few words for the speech, Bowles' most important contribution was thematic. He instilled the ideals of change and progress into the speech[19] and while the text was altered wholesale from the draft sent to Moyers on 24 December[20] that theme is still visible in the final speech; change is discussed extensively by the President, particularly around the Great Society. Johnson stated, "I do not believe that the Great Society is the ordered, changeless, and sterile battalion of the ants. It is the excitement of becoming – always becoming, trying, probing, falling, resting, and trying again – but always trying and always gaining."[21]

[18] L Harris, "President Gaining in Public Approval," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1965, p. 20.
[19] See memorandum from Bill Moyers thanking Bowles for this: Memorandum from Bill D Moyers to Chester Bowles, 18 January 1965, "The President's Inaugural Address," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 137, LBJ Library.
[20] Memorandum and draft speech text from Chester Bowles to Bill Moyers, 24 December 1964, "The President's Inaugural Address," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 137, LBJ Library.
[21] Lyndon B Johnson, "The President's Inaugural Address," 20 January 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26985.

Once again, the President allowed numerous people to work on this address; at the same time Ambassador Bowles was creating a draft, Jack Valenti was also working on an early version that was sent to the President on 28 December.[22] Like the State of the Union, it was important that this address to the nation was well thought-out. As the first address of the elected president, the speech had to be a strong piece of literature that succinctly summed up the ideals that Johnson was hoping to exemplify in the coming years. By delegating the task of drafting the speech to several trusted staffers, Johnson was able to choose aspects of each discourse that he liked and discard those that did not suit his goals; Bowles' theme of change was taken, with the latter's language discarded, and Valenti's draft built on this. The theme of change was to be stressed, and it was essential for the language of the speech to be right. To that end, and as the time of the address grew nearer, McGeorge Bundy suggested once again putting the "[w]holly fair and unprejudiced"[23] Bill Moyers at the head of the speechwriting team. This was to edit final changes and balance any potential issues out amongst the writers, and advocated strong language and a "Johnsonian" tone against potential press criticism of the President's goals. It is notable that Bundy mentions in his memorandum that the reporter Scotty Reston contacted the administration looking for news on what he termed, "New isolationism." The administration still had issues with journalists who they felt were prying for information, and Bundy's suggestion of a strong rhetorical response – termed as "taking out an insurance against criticism," in the memorandum – is telling. Johnson needed to ensure positive press from this speech, and it was also important that the United States' strategy on Vietnam was not questioned. Although Vietnam was not mentioned by name, the inaugural address was clear on Johnson's intentions in this respect: "If American lives must end," he proclaimed, "and American treasure be spilled, in countries that we barely know, then that is the price that change has demanded of conviction and of our enduring covenant."[24] This was the insurance Bundy spoke of;

[22] Memorandum from Jack Valenti to the President, 28 December 1964, "The President's Inaugural Address," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 137, LBJ Library.
[23] Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to the President, 19 January 1965, "The President's Inaugural Address," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 137, LBJ Library.
[24] The President's Inaugural Address, 20 January 1965.

this sentence is a tacit warning of things to come in Vietnam, the implication being that bloodshed in the name of freedom was inevitable, and, by tying it into the theme of change that was also encompassing domestic policies and the Great Society, Johnson bound the two together irrevocably. This was, however, an example of the short sighted public relations strategy that began during the election campaign; where previously Johnson denounced Barry Goldwater as a dangerous interventionist in Vietnam, he was now priming the country to accept exactly that – escalation and further intervention in South East Asia. A meeting with the President at which George Bundy took notes discussed escalation; LBJ himself remarked that he was sceptical of the view that escalation would help morale. Undersecretary of state George Ball pushed for diplomatic efforts to be increased, but there was no doubt that escalation was a very real possibility, if not a probability, by this point, and Johnson's vehemently argued anti-escalation stance of 1964 looks foolish in light of this.

Nevertheless, the inaugural address was well received, drawing praise from those in government and from newspaper columnists across the country; Reston, writing for the *New York Times,* wrote in a column focusing on the pomp and ceremony of the event the following day that, "America is still young enough to hope and dream and believe. The rest of the world… probably accept Lyndon Johnson's promise."[25] Reston likened Johnson's speech to that of previous presidential inaugurations; a similarity Johnson himself took note of in the State of the Union address. Tom Wicker, syndicated for the *New York T*imes noted that the President "obviously enjoyed himself," in an article reprinted across the country.[26]

Just as in the case of the State of the Union address, the President ostensibly did himself no harm with the inaugural address; the President received a personal telegram from his fellow Texan Senator Ralph Yarborough (D-Texas) which gushed, "Your fellow Texans have a special pride in this

[25] J Reston, "Paradox and Reason: President Blends Religion and Politics in a Strong Appeal for Faith and Unity," *New York Times*, 21 January 1965, p. 17.
[26] T Wicker, "LBJ Vows Conquest of Misery, Begins Full Term as 36th US President," *Arizona Daily Star*, 21 January 1965, p. 1.

inauguration."[27] Coming as closely together as they did, the two speeches share a common theme; the ideals of hope and clarity, of moving forward as a country and fighting off the negativity which threatened to encroach on the nation's psyche. These were not unusual themes for an incoming President, especially one who enjoyed as much goodwill as Johnson did at the end of 1964, and the goodwill he received certainly boosted his confidence moving further into the year. However, it is important to note that the President himself brought together foreign and domestic politics in his inaugural address. From a short-term point of view, it was necessary to stand firm in the face of potential escalation in Vietnam, particularly given that the potential for escalation was high following the discussion of the National Security Council and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964. Certainly, the Harris Poll of 22 February showed that 83% of respondents backed Johnson in ordering retaliatory bombings against North Vietnam – Johnson's popularity was strong following his performance at the State of the Union and inaugural address.[28] However in the long run throwing the idea of American soldiers fighting and dying in far-away countries together with the hopes and dreams of the Great Society could only end in disaster. This was a short-term strategy designed to help Johnson maintain popularity at the moment of the address, and events would soon force his hand in Vietnam.

For now, however, the public still supported Johnson's Vietnam tactics. A Gallup Poll published on 16 February agreed with Harris, if not as conclusively, claiming that 67% of respondents who were aware of events in Vietnam approved of Johnson's actions.[29] Both the Gallup and Harris polls were special reports that gauged reaction to the events of the attacks on Camp Holloway in Pleiku, Vietnam, on 6 February. This attack marked the first time that American soldiers were the focus of North Vietnamese attacks, rather than a secondary target. Johnson's reaction was one of anger; as Kathleen Turner argues, Johnson viewed Vietnam as a peripheral issue, but this did not

[27] Telegram from Ralph Yarborough to President Johnson, 20 January 1965, "The President's Inaugural Address," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson Collection, box 137, LBJ Library.
[28] L Harris, "Harris Survey: Most Back Johnson on Viet Reprisals," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1965, p. 5
[29] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1925.

mean he was not concerned about the area, or the implications of increasing violence to his own popularity. The killing of the eight American soldiers at Pleiku represented an attack on a group of men who were still officially employed in an advisory capacity, who were not at war with the North Vietnamese. That they were now under attack infuriated Johnson.[30] He convened a meeting of the National Security Council, where it was decided to initiate a retaliatory airstrike.[31] Johnson was kept abreast of these attacks by Cyrus Vance, McNamara's deputy Defense Secretary, who called him in the early hours. Johnson requested that Vance, "keep calling… when you get anything,"[32] – he knew the gravity of the situation and needed to be aware of what was going on. Johnson's need to be constantly updated on matters he considered urgent was well documented – he previously admonished George Ball for not keeping him in the loop: ""I don't care a fuck that it was three in the morning; I want to know what's being done whatever time of night it may be."[33] It was therefore not prudent for one of Johnson's advisors to leave the President out of their decision making if he or she wanted to avoid the wrath of the president, and his need to be at the top of the decision making tree in all situations was apparent. As it was, the National Security Council met once more on 7 February, where a statement to be read to the press on the strikes was approved and issued to George Reedy to action.[34] *The New York Times* printed the story on 8 February, alongside the pledge from the Gulf of Tonkin incident repeated by Johnson when he announced the reprisals – that America would seek no wider war.[35] Smaller newspapers carried Associated Press reports of the story, with the *Tallahassee Democrat* in Tallahassee, Florida, capturing the mood of the nation in its editorial, "It was Time to Strike Back." The editorial summed up widespread feeling on Pleiku; "We

[30] On the Pleiku attacks and subsequent National Security Council meeting, see K J Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 111-13.
[31] For a partial transcript of this meeting, see Summary Notes of the 545th Meeting of the National Security council, *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1964-1968*, vol. II, Vietnam, January – June 1965, doc. 76, 6 February 1965, p. 156.
[32] For partial transcripts of the president's multiple conversations with Vance in the early morning of 7 February, see M R Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes 1964-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001) pp. 172-74.
[33] G Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982) p. 429.
[34] As described in Summary notes of the 546th Meeting of the National Security Council, transcribed by Bromley Smith, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. II, Vietnam, January – June 1965 doc. 80, 7 February 1965, p. 167.
[35] T Wicker, "Capital is Tense – But President Asserts Nation Still Opposes Widening of War," *New York Times*, 8 February 1965, p. 1.

are inclined to agree with those critics who say that such timidity only breeds boldness to a bully and wins nothing in the end," and ended by noting, "we are proud that President Johnson ordered," retaliatory bombings.[36] The mood was clearly one of large-scale support for retaliation against Vietnam, but this did not necessarily mean large-scale support for further escalation. Yet again, Johnson used a short-term solution to plaster over tensions in Vietnam by committing to his earlier peaceful path in the post-retaliation statement; a path that was becoming more tenuous by the day. Privately, Johnson already knew that ground troops would be necessary and discussions on the matter were ongoing; on 26 February, he admitted to McNamara, "I'm scared to death of putting ground forces in, but I'm *more* frightened about losing a bunch of planes from lack of security."[37] It is appropriate that the same journalist who reported on Pleiku – Tom Wicker – discussed in a book review just the previous day how Johnson seemed to function as his own press secretary. "He is as accessible and as talkative as a President could be," asserted Wicker, "yet no honest reporter ever leaves a news conference believing that he has learned a single fact that the President did not want him to know to begin with."[38] The American public, with their 67% Gallup approval rating, would stand behind Johnson and his decision-making in Pleiku, but it is important to remember that the press already made a note of Johnson's evasive attitude in press conferences and his continuing gripes with the press corps coverage of both himself and the situation in Vietnam. Johnson told a reporter at a press conference in November, "Some people are speculating and taking positions that I would think are somewhat premature,"[39] and certainly contributed to an uneasy atmosphere around the White House after Pleiku. Once again, the President's credibility was at stake and, as Bundy noted in a lengthy memorandum to Johnson on 7 February, "The events of the last twenty-four hours have produced a practicable point of departure,"[40] for increased reprisals in Vietnam. It

[36] "It Was Time to Strike Back," *Tallahassee Democrat (*Tallahassee, FL*)*, 8 February 1965, p. 4.
[37] Telephone call, Robert McNamara to President Johnson, 26 February 1965, in M R Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 193-195.
[38] T Wicker, "The Bully Pulpit," *New York Times*, 7 February 1965, p. 104.
[39] *Public Papers of the Presidents*, quoted in Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 117.
[40] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. II, Vietnam, January-June 1965 doc. 84, 7 February 1965, p. 175.

was time for the President to act, to both increase American military presence in the country and to remove US dependants and non-military personnel from harm's way to prepare for escalation. To that end, Bundy and a group of staff who had been observing the situation in Vietnam also prepared a plan of action to introduce escalation. Bundy would proceed to outline a speech for the president, which would explain his actions in Vietnam and announce an escalation of the conflict to the nation. The President pushed back on the idea of the speech, suggesting that the Secretary of state or Vietnam ambassador Adlai Stevenson handle all public duties.[41] This is another example of the President's short-term outlook on public relations, which hindered his ability to reach out to the American public. By requesting that one of his subordinates take charge of the Vietnam situation, at a crucial juncture, he risked proving previous press fears that he was unfit for purpose as a president dealing with foreign relations – Johnson's preferred focus was always on domestic policy and this was picked up on early by the press. The problem was compounded by Bundy's agreement with Johnson; his memorandum to the president went on to state," there is real gain in keeping you out of the immediate military aspect of the matter at this stage."[42] In the end, Bundy's proposed February speech never happened. This failure to commit to a frank and open discussion of the administration's Vietnam policies would retrospectively make the President look weaker; respected commentators from the press such as Walter Lippmann began to push him on his goals in Southeast Asia and his credibility on foreign policy was endangered when he did take the decision to escalate. It would take the President over a month to respond to his critics; the landmark speech that was given at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, on 7 April would therefore become one of the most important foreign policy speeches of Johnson's time in office. It would publicly show for the first time the reactive strategy he was employing over the question of Vietnam since the election campaign of 1964.

[41] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. II, Vietnam, January-June 1965 doc. 124, 16 February 1965, p. 283.
[42] Ibid.

Johnson plainly needed to make a statement on American involvement in Vietnam, and the Johns Hopkins address became a vital piece of his strategy to placate the grumbling of the press and of his own backroom staff who agitated for a full disclosure of the President's policy. It was clear to the likes of Bundy and Moyers that somebody had to clarify the administration's position, even if it was not Johnson himself, but all efforts to persuade the President were rebuffed. Now, the President accepted an invitation to speak at Johns Hopkins and wanted to make a statement; McGeorge Bundy and George Reedy recommended announcing the speech several days beforehand in a memorandum to Johnson and aimed for a 9pm timeslot on television to maximise the potential audience.[43] Johnson's issues with the press were ongoing at this time; Johnson's former friend and syndicated columnist Joseph Alsop accused him of wiretapping his phone and in turn Johnson accused Alsop of going through the menopause and, "going crazy," to his Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and Bundy.[44] As well as this, the influential columnist Scotty Reston added to the wiretapping issue – a Pentagon official informed him that the FBI had tapped his son, Dick.[45] To make up for the difficulties that Johnson was having with press correspondents, the administration strongly courted Walter Lippmann, who previously claimed, "There is no tolerable alternative [in Vietnam] except a negotiated truce." This was done by having Johnson go to lunch with him in mid-March and subsequently inviting him to the White House to discuss the Johns Hopkins speech before allowing him to read a draft the day before it was to be given, on 6 April. Lippmann reportedly approved of the speech.[46] Jack Valenti also noted that the President brought in several media figures; Charlie Mohr, Muriel Dobbins, Doug Cornell and, "an unidentified pressman," and read them

[43] Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, 5 April 1965, "Address at Johns Hopkins University," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 143, LBJ Library.
[44] For more information, see telephone call from Nicholas Katzenbach to President Johnson, 29 March 1965, at 18:24, and telephone call from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, 30 March, at 09:12, in M R Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 251-60.
[45] See LBJ's conversation with Nicholas Katzenbach, cited above, which turned into a three-way phone call with Bill Moyers, who provided details of his discussion with Reston.
[46] For Lippmann's words, along with an account of the White House's attempt to court his good favour, see Turner's chapter on the evolution of the Johns Hopkins address, in *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, pp. 111-33.

a copy of the speech the night before it was given.[47] Turner argues that in his dealings with Lippmann on the Johns Hopkins address, Johnson afforded him, and other members of the press, the same privileges as he did key senators such as Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) and J William Fulbright (D-Arkansas), highlighting the importance he placed on the role of the press in putting his remarks across to the public. It is difficult to argue with this summary; Johnson finally recognised the need to act, and that he would need aid from the press to put his views across in a manner that retained his credibility with the largest majority of the people. The potential for bad press was obvious; making a dramatic speech on foreign policy would undoubtedly leave some section of the American people disenfranchised, either the hawks who implored the President to take a harder stance on Vietnam, or the doves who advocated withdrawal. To this end, it was quite proactive of Johnson to bring the press on board during the writing stages of the speech. However, this did not completely mask the fact that the administration was organising the speech in a reactive environment, moving late and playing catch-up on the events that surrounded them.

It was quickly realised that several student groups were planning to picket the speech; one of Johnson's personal secret service agents, Rufus Youngblood, sent a memorandum on the day of the speech detailing their intended actions and advising how the President would avoid coming into contact with them.[48] The press and student protestors were not the only groups Johnson was having difficulty with; the entire proposed speech was called into question by the demand for a ceasefire issued by Canadian Prime Minister Lester B Pearson on 2 April during a speech at Temple University in Philadelphia. According to Burke and Greenstein Pearson's remarks on the war "incensed"[49] Johnson and caused him to tell aides that the Johns Hopkins speech was cancelled. This is backed up

[47] Valenti's notes on the Johns Hopkins Speech, "Address at Johns Hopkins University," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 143, LBJ Library.
[48] Memorandum from Rufus Youngblood, 7 April 1965, "Address at Johns Hopkins University," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 143, LBJ Library.
[49] F Burke et al., *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam in 1954 and 1965* (London: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), p. 187.

by Jack Valenti's typed notes on the speechwriting process for Johns Hopkins.[50] The President's volatile temper and thin skin were once again jeopardising an important public relations moment, and his reaction to Pearson's comments was extreme. This is a prime example of Johnson's reactive nature, as his anger caused him to react strongly to Pearson's views and change plans in the blink of an eye, although Valenti did note that, while the President called off the speech, he left the time open in his diary.[51] This would imply that Johnson never truly intended to call off the speech, but wanted to send a statement that he would not tolerate dissension in the ranks of his own advisors. Pearson's comments were evidently not taken lightly.

Ultimately, the Johns Hopkins speech itself was a well-rehearsed exercise in the rapidly developing Johnsonian style. At Johnson's request[52], Valenti inserted a piece about his going to bed at night; Johnson asked himself each night if he had done enough for his country. Stories such as this could not seem to have come from the mind of a speechwriter; Johnson needed to have a personal touch. He wanted the people to know that the words were his and that the story was his. To this end, a second tale regarding the electrification of the Texas hill country, something Johnson took great pride in, was also added. Similar anecdotes were added to speeches throughout his time in office at his own asking, in an attempt to reflect the president's already established earthy quality. The speech reflected the carrot and stick approach, which has been discussed as a hallmark of the Johnson presidency by Kathleen Turner, Hinckley, and Brace,[53] among others. The President's stick in this case was the aggression of North Vietnam. The carrot was the "billion dollar investment,"[54] in the form of the Mekong River Project, aid and medicine that America was offering so long as the North Vietnamese ceased aggression. Valenti returned the billion-dollar offer to the speech draft

[50] Valenti's Notes on the Johns Hopkins Speech.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] P Brace and B Hinckley, *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 137.
[54] L B Johnson, "Address at Johns Hopkins University: "Peace Without Conquest,"" 7 April 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26877.

following its removal by the State Department.[55] It satisfied Johnson's desire for newsworthy headlines in his speeches and reflected what the president believed was a magnanimous gesture to be offered to the North Vietnamese; it amounted to a bribe to stop aggression, something which was pounced on by Republicans in the headlines of the following day.[56] Nevertheless, the president's carrot, offered to the North Vietnamese, was taken up by large sections of the press. An editorial by Max Frankel in the *New York Times* on 8 April discussed how the clamour from those around the administration for public negotiations with North Vietnam, "has especially disturbed those officials who have been trying to regain for President Johnson some of the stature, sympathy and respect that President Kennedy enjoyed around the world."[57] The *Times* editorial went on to say that, "the country can take pride,"[58] in the Johns Hopkins address. The President was rightly on a high; the press reaction from outlets such as the *Times* and *Newsweek* was exactly what he was been looking for, but still he ruminated on negative feedback to Tex Goldschmidt, who worked with Valenti and Richard Goodwin on the Mekong River project[59]. "I got a bunch of mean wires who are raising hell from all over the country,"[60] he complained to Goldschmidt. Nevertheless, large sections of the press were satisfied and former president Eisenhower called to congratulate Johnson on the speech later that evening.[61] Reaction from the government branches was also strong; Senators Morse and Gruening, who voted against the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, were predictably strongly against further action in Vietnam but a report drafted by Bundy for the President noted that of the fifteen senators who remarked on Johns Hopkins, these two staunchly anti-war men were the only negative commenters. In the House, only two of twelve congressmen who spoke out were against the speech, although Bundy pointed out that one of them, Congressman Thomas Pelly (R-Washington) only

[55] Valenti's Notes on the Johns Hopkins Speech.
[56] United Press International, "Democrats Hail Johnson's Talk, G.O.P Sees Move to Buy Peace," *New York Times*, 8 April 1965, p. 17.
[57] M Frankel, "Johnson's Speech Viewed as Bid to World Opinion," *New York Times*, 8 April 1965, p. 1
[58] Ibid., p. 17.
[59] Valenti's Notes on the Johns Hopkins Speech.
[60] Telephone call from Arthur "Tex" Goldschmidt to President Johnson, 8 April 1965, 10:27, cited in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 271-72.
[61] Telephone call from Dwight D Eisenhower to President Johnson, 8 April 1965, 17:58, cited in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 273-74.

disputed the aid package and was happy with the clarification of the American position on Vietnam. The other, Bo Callaway (R-Georgia), raised the spectre of the paper tiger argument, suggesting that Johnson's policy changed from one of strength to "Buying friendship."[62] Regardless of this dissension, the reaction from the House and the Senate was strongly in favour of the speech. Yuravlivker notes that Johnson's rhetoric achieved exactly what he wanted; "framing reality in such a way as to preclude rational discussion and debate."[63] The president was looking for a mandate to proceed in Vietnam, and felt that the reaction gave this to the administration.

Gallup polls taken two weeks after Johns Hopkins and published on 2 May saw Johnson's popularity at 67%,[64] while a further poll taken at the same time and published on 16 May suggested that 52% of people thought Vietnam policy was being handled as well as could be expected, with 27% feeling that affairs were being handled badly.[65] It seemed like Johnson's hard work was paying off; although anti-war demonstrations at Johns Hopkins were loud and signalled intent from those who opposed Vietnam policy, the majority of the population actually showed hawkish tendencies when asked for their views on the matter, something that sat well with the President's current actions and with Johnson's own views on the subject. Johnson's popularity levels were still strong, and the proclamation on Vietnam seemed to have done no harm. But Johnson still showed a short-term, reactive vision that belied his public opinion victories. As recently as 1 April Johnson approved further escalations to troop levels in Vietnam[66], and it was only a matter of time before he would need to announce the vastly unpopular draft system to the public. He announced the escalation after a delay, and following months of proclamations to the contrary. He also knew that more was

[62] Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, 10 April 1965, "Address at Johns Hopkins University," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 143, LBJ Library.
[63] D Yuravlivker, "Peace Without Conquest; Lyndon Johnson's Speech of April 7 1965," *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* vol. 36, no. 3, (September 2006) p. 466.
[64] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1936.
[65] Ibid., p. 1940.
[66] McGeorge Bundy and Central Intelligence Agency Director John McCone took separate notes of a meeting on 1 April which approved this; see Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Carter)*, FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. II, Vietnam, January – June 1965 doc. 230*, 1* April 1965, p. 513.

planned, and that a large number of American soldiers would be needed to avoid a resounding defeat in Vietnam.

A memorandum from CIA Director John McCone to Johnson from 17 March concluded that both he and Robert McNamara agreed that the military situation, "degraded considerably,"[67] since the end of 1964 and Bundy warned the President to caution the people that America faced a long struggle in Vietnam[68]. Even Johnson himself bemoaned the troop situation to his wife on 7 March – "I can't get out, and I can't finish it with what I have got. And I don't know what the hell to do!"[69] However, the public knew none of this. Johnson's statement masked the need for military action and escalation behind offers of help and support; his carrot and stick approach was now foreshadowing the gap that would later emerge in his credibility in the coming years. While it is clearly not prudent for a leader to reveal classified administration discussions to the public and Johnson evidently felt that he would be giving away too much if he did discuss the terms of escalation, it is also not prudent to wilfully mislead the public. Johnson outlined the reasons why America was in Vietnam; he did not discuss the impending escalation of combat there and it is partially because of this glaring omission that the draft announcement of 28 July caused widespread unrest. Troop increases would continue as the year went on. Rottinghaus has argued that the president did not necessarily fail to react to public opinion at this time, but that the magnitude of hawkish communication being sent to the White House reinforced his belief that he was in the right, and his popularity was still strong. This may have been true in 1965, but Johnson's continued reliance on the public opinion apparatus moving forward would again show a lack of foresight as his popularity slid quickly in the following two years.[70] The president's policy of gradual escalation was also a hindrance; Johnson was a consensus politician. He wanted people to agree with him and always at least made it look like he

[67] Memorandum For The Record*, FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. II, Vietnam, January – June 1965, doc. 206*,* 17 March 1965, p. 459.
[68] Bundy quoted in S Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (London: Century, 1983), p. 414.
[69] Lady Bird Johnson's Tape Recorded Diary, 7 March 1965, quoted in Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, p. 216.
[70] B Rottinghaus, "Following the Mail Hawks: Alternative Measures of Public Opinion on Vietnam in the Johnson White House," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), pp. 367-91.

encouraged full and frank debates on his policy making before making any kind of announcement. This is why George Ball was allowed to express private dissent over Vietnam issues to Johnson during his time working as the undersecretary for Robert McNamara, the secretary of defence. This style worked very well in domestic politics and policy, where Johnson's strengths lay and he had made his name. In the foreign policy arena, consensus politics meant that Johnson looked to be dithering over important issues. The Vietnam working group he created after his election was described by Stanley Karnow as a "bureaucratic layer cake," which he felt suited Johnson as it, "offered him the chance to create unanimity." The problem, surmises Karnow, was that, "in the end, the final choices were to be his – and his alone."[71] Johnson had to take responsibility for escalation in Vietnam, but instead hid behind stage-managed press conferences and tried to manipulate the public's image of the war and American objectives in Vietnam. The tactics he used so skilfully to defuse the impact of Vietnam on his election campaign could not last forever; in the short term, it was easy to pull the wool over the eyes of the people. However, Johnson and his advisors did not have a long-term plan to reconcile what was going on in the background with the public statements that were being made. This would ultimately prove to be the downfall of both the foreign and domestic policies that the president worked so hard to implement. For now, however, the Great Society and Vietnam remained as separate entities, and it was to his preferred domestic scene that Johnson wanted to return in the summer of 1965. However, Vietnam was already beginning to cut into the President's domestic affairs.

Despite the magnitude of his record of success in passing legislation as a politician, Johnson was not having an easy time passing his domestic reforms; certainly, it had been more difficult than he would have hoped for. Liberals argued that his civil rights bill did not go far enough; conservatives felt it went too far. Black rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. felt that Johnson was pushing his poverty reforms over civil rights legislation and campaigned in Selma, Alabama, in the early months of 1965 to push for a bill that would guarantee the vote for black citizens in the South. The

[71] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, p. 403.

Selma campaign was of particular consternation to Johnson, who spoke with King on 15 January to try and bring him onside with the Great Society plans: "Let's us try to get health, and education, and poverty through the first ninety days,"[72] he implored, but the protest went on. Johnson was dealing with Dr King's arrest in Selma at the same time as the Pleiku attacks in Vietnam. The day before Pleiku on 5 February Johnson had a conversation with Katzenbach in which he noted that he expected, "Quid pro quos," from King, hoping he would relax his pressure for an immediate voting rights bill in exchange for public support given in a press conference the previous day.[73] This is an example of the difficulties faced by the administration in forming a proactive, inclusive strategy; in the first three months of Johnson's elected leadership domestic and the foreign policy issues were already clashing and causing much consternation for the President. As well as this, the political landscape of the 1960s was pushing and pulling Johnson in several directions. For every Martin Luther King pushing civil rights legislation there was a Senator Richard B. Russell (D-Georgia) trying to block progress on this front, and the issue of hawks and doves was already becoming a difficult one in terms of the escalating war.

The Voting Rights Act was announced on 15 March, with a memorable performance by Johnson in which he famously stated, "We shall overcome,"[74] galvanising the civil rights movement. Johnson's pleasure in the moment came from the record high viewership of the speech; 93 million reportedly watched the announcement, as he noted in a conversation with the mayor of Chicago Richard Daley, who called with his congratulations.[75] The *New York Times* reported that he was interrupted 36 times for bursts of applause and standing ovations,[76] a statistic which undoubtedly

[72] Telephone call between President Johnson and Martin Luther King, 15 January 1965, 12:06, in Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, pp 161-163.
[73] Telephone call from Nick Katzenbach to President Johnson, 5 February 1965, 15:00, in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 171-72.
[74] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise," 15 March 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26805.
[75] Telephone call from Richard J Daley to President Johnson, 16 March 1965, 10:03, in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory,* p. 228.
[76] T Wicker, "Nation Hears Him: President, in TV Talk, Pledges, "We Shall Overcome,"" *New York Times*, 16 March 1965, p. 1.

was of keen interest to Johnson. The speech was clearly a particularly strong example of Johnson's oratory skills, and it is worth noting that in a Gallup poll taken prior to events in Selma only 3% of people felt that the President was unfair towards blacks in America; fewer than thought he was unfair against whites.[77] By May, however, 29% of people still felt that America's treatment of racial minorities was one of the three largest problems facing the country.[78] Johnson was still seen by Gallup's poll respondents as a fair and strong leader, but there was clearly an appetite for further change, something that the Great Society needed to work towards as the year progressed.

1965 also saw the passage of the Medicare bill, on 30 July. Johnson had been working to push the bill through since the previous year, when he announced it. In a phone call in September 1964 to Senator Anderson (D-New Mexico), Johnson discussed a "disaster" when the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee went back on a deal to support the bill.[79] He discussed problems with passing the bill as early as 1 October with Hubert Humphrey: "I don't know whether we can pass it next year or not."[80] This was therefore a major victory for Johnson and his administration; alongside poverty and racial equality, medical care was one of the cornerstones of the Great Society program. Medicare made the front page of the following day's *New York Times*, with quotes from Johnson proclaiming, "No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine."[81] The next week, *TIME Magazine* printed a list of Johnson's achievements in office so far, noting, "The 98th Congress – under Lyndon Johnson's prodding – has compiled a truly astonishing record of accomplishment."[82] Moving quickly forward, the Voting Rights Act was signed on 6 August. Further to his speech on 15 March, Johnson noted that the act was "nothing less than granting every American Negro his freedom to enter the mainstream of American

[77] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1931.
[78] Ibid., p. 1939.
[79] Telephone call between President Johnson and Clinton Anderson, 24 September 1964, 20:50, in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 41-42.
[80] Telephone call between President Johnson and Hubert Humphrey, 1 October 1964, 21:46, in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 43-46.
[81] J D Morris, "President Signs Medicare Bill," *New York Times*, 31 July 1965, p. 1.
[82] "Nation: The Legislative Scorecard," *TIME Magazine,* 6 August 1965, p. 18.

life."[83] As well as this, Johnson still held a 65% approval rating in Gallup's published poll of 4 August, compiled in July.[84] Despite this goodwill from the public, and the incredible run of form that Johnson had in passing legislation that culminated in the signing of the Medicare bill and the Voting Rights Act, the administration was aware of problems in disseminating information that could severely affect the President.

Even though there were several wins for the administration on the domestic front, there was a growing discontent in the press about the president's lack of forthright conversation on Vietnam. Joseph Alsop's weekly syndicated column, released the day after the signing of the Medicare bill, skirted around domestic success despite mentioning domestic policy in the column's title. Alsop focused almost completely on the decision taken on 28 July to send 44 combat battalions to South Vietnam and said Johnson revealed "rock bottom minimum" about the administration's Vietnam policy. Regarding the precise situation in Vietnam, he claimed, "No one can tell from his press conference." Alsop concluded that Johnson visibly longed to go back to the "domestic miracle working which he so much enjoys."[85] In response to similar press coverage, Douglass Cater, a former journalist who served as a special assistant to the President on health, education and welfare, called a meeting of several important advisors and administration staff, including McGeorge Bundy and Joe Califano, on 3 August in the White House staff mess hall. An in depth discussion of the problems faced by the administration followed. Cater noted that, with the exception of ex-president Eisenhower, "We don't seem to have the elder statesmen anymore," as well as noting that newscasters now performed a different function from the likes of Ed Murrow and Elmer Davis, who, "quieten us and give us perspective." Clearly, Cater recognised the changing nature of journalism and news reporting in the 1960s. Importantly, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs James L.

[83] Lyndon B Johnson, "Remarks on the Signing of the Voting Rights Act, 6 August 1965," full transcript and video file available from the Miller Center at the University of Virginia and online at http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-4034.
[84] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1955.
[85] J Alsop, "Home Front Ever Present in Johnson Viet Policy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 31 July 1965, p. 34.

Greenfield followed this conversation up by pointing out what he saw as an information problem. He noted that;

> First, we are always meeting the crisis of the moment. In practice, there is little time to think about the long term or the philosophical. We only plug holes and run as fast as we can to stay even. Second, we seem to be obsessed by Vietnam. Foreigners especially believe that the President thinks of nothing else but Vietnam. This is not a healthy image.[86]

Greenfield, who was previously *TIME Magazine*'s chief diplomatic correspondent, had much to say on the problem, much of it accurate.[87] He also noted that the administration should "[t]ry to do something about this curious business involving newsmen who say 'the American people don't know what's going on.'"[88] The group agreed that the war constituted a completely new type of conflict and that coverage was going to increase as time went on. Greenfield recognised the dissonance that was at play between the administration's dealings with the public and what was going on in the background, and identified that the administration was constantly playing catch-up and was not making attempts to get out in front of potential issues, something that this chapter has sought to explore in depth. This exchange shows that some inside the administration made the connection to something that would become a long-term problem, particularly as problems began to increase both in Vietnam and at home. A reactive perspective on press coverage was being pursued as opposed to a pro-active approach. The pitfalls of reacting to events were obvious even at that time; the administration struggled to keep up with events and this led to Johnson doing exactly what Greenfield described – plugging the holes and running as fast as he could to catch the next one. A follow up meeting from the next day went into further detail on several of the points raised,

[86] Memorandum for the Record, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, doc. 105, 3 August 1965, p. 296.
[87] Greenfield returned to the press when his stint at the White House ended in 1966, and in 1971 was one of the *New York Times* editors responsible for releasing the Pentagon Papers – a top secret study conducted by Secretary of Defense McNamara on Vietnam.
[88] Memorandum for the Record, *FRUS 1964-1*968, vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965 doc. 105, 3 August 1965 p. 297.

including the idea of Vietnam being an unprecedented situation, but no further mention of Greenfield's point about long-term thinking was made.[89] This is important to note – it was not discussed in any Vietnam meetings in the immediate aftermath of this conversation, showing that if nothing else, Greenfield was not taken seriously when he brought it up. As it was, the administration's inability to anticipate and head off potential crises in the court of public opinion would ultimately prove to be its undoing as a gap in credibility began to open in the following months and years.

The outcome of the press coverage meetings was that, firstly, Moyers asked for memoranda to be prepared for the President with ideas on what should be done to expedite the information dissemination process in Saigon and Washington. Secondly, Califano indicated to Dean Rusk on 9 August that Johnson wanted to put Barry Zorthian, who was present at the second meeting, in charge of all press briefings coming out of Vietnam in order to increase his prestige with both the press and the public, and make him, "the Bill Moyers of Saigon."[90] Journalists who would make their professional names in Vietnam, such as David Halberstam, Stanley Karnow and Neil Sheehan, questioned Zorthian's briefings to the press, which quickly became known as "Five O'clock Follies," amongst those who attended them. Zorthian, himself, later lamented, "In Vietnam, we reached a stage where the government's word was questioned until proven true, whereas in the past it had been the government's word is valid until proven to be wrong."[91] Clearly, nobody had taken the warning of James Greenfield on board, and this would become more obvious as the Johnson presidency moved into 1966 and beyond.

For now, however, Johnson still enjoyed strong poll ratings and was working hard to pass his domestic legislation. Lady Bird Johnson noted in her daily diary on 27 August, "Whatever the strains

[89] Memorandum of Conversation, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, doc. 117, p. 322.
[90] Ibid., p. 323.
[91] B Zorthian, quoted by D Martin in "Barry Zorthian, U.S. Diplomat in Vietnam, Dies at 90*," New York Times*, 5 January 2011, accessed online on 15 May 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/06/world/asia/06zorthian.html?_r=0.

and tensions and distresses of the day in Washington had been, they were not noticeable in Lyndon's manner. He was like a man riding on a crest of achievement and success."[92] A *TIME Magazine* article on Press Secretary Bill Moyers in October noted that when he took over in July, "Johnson's relations with the press had never been worse," but noted that thus far he looked like a strong appointment on Johnson's behalf and an example of the administration taking the time to understand and placate the press.[93] A health scare in the latter part of the year saw Johnson admitted to the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, in October – an issue with his gall bladder required an operation and this was announced to the public on 5 October.[94] Johnson worried that his convalescence might alarm the American people; *TIME* noted that he organised a news conference from the medical centre to allay these potential fears, and put himself on display for around fifty journalists.[95]

As 1965 drew to a close, Johnson remained popular. His Gallup Poll approval ratings remained at 66% in November,[96] and 62% in December[97], a minor fall. On 21 November, a published poll stated that 64% of respondents agreed that American forces should be in Vietnam.[98] However, the signs of domestic unrest were also there. The Watts, Los Angeles, race riots of August saw Johnson cut himself off from his advisors; Joe Califano exceeded his authority to give "Presidential approval" for the U.S. Army to step in and help maintain order in Watts.[99] Lady Bird Johnson showed the characteristic Johnsonian siege mentality by pre-emptively denouncing the media following the President's response: "I hope a lot of people heard him because he's going to get the blame for

[92] Lady Bird Johnson, quoted in Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, p. 418.
[93] "The Administration: L.B.J.'s Young Man In Charge of Everything," *TIME Magazine*, 29 October 1965, p. 16.
[94] For full details of the announcement, see the transcript of the announcement made to the public; L B. Johnson, "Statement by the President Announcing That He Would Undergo Surgery," 5 October 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27295.
[95] *TIME Magazine*, 22 October 1965, p. 21.
[96] Gallup, *The Gallup Polls*, pp. 1968-69.
[97] Ibid, p. 1977.
[98] Ibid, p. 1971.
[99] Califano, quoted in Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, p. 420.

letting [blacks] go too far, too fast."[100] Protests against the Vietnam War continued to the end of the year; on two occasions in November demonstrators set fire to themselves to protest American action in Vietnam. The death of Quaker Norman Morrison in front of the Pentagon made the front page of the *New York Time*s on 3 November,[101] and that of Catholic Worker Roger Allen LaPorte outside the United Nations Building was reported on 9 November.[102] A third woman, Celene Jankowski, self-immolated in her home in South Bend, Indiana, on the same day.[103] The Associated Press quoted LaPorte as saying he set himself alight "as a religious action," to protest the war.[104] It is however, worth noting that the war was now polarising American society; in the weeks before the two men committed suicide a 32 feet long telegram was sent to the White House with the signatures of 2,057 students and faculty members from the University of Michigan. This is notable because the University of Michigan was the birthplace of the teach-in, a form of academic protest against Vietnam. *TIME Magazine* reported the participants of one such protest at the University of Wisconsin, Madison negatively as "A ragtag collection of the unshaven and unscrubbed," showing support for the administration tacitly.[105] However, with protests on the war beginning to mount, discussion began to turn to the potential for a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam, and inevitably how this would affect Johnson's stature with the US public.

McGeorge Bundy sent a memorandum from Undersecretary of Defense George Ball to the President on 17 November and again on 27 November detailing the advantages of calling a temporary halt to offensive actions in Vietnam. Bundy noted that a recent article published in *Look Magazine* strengthened negative views on the administration's push for peace and that such a

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[100] Lady Bird Johnson's Tape Recorded Diary, 15 August 1965, quoted in Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, p. 421.
[101] "War Critic Burns Himself to Death Outside Pentagon," *New York Times*, 3 November 1965, p. 1.
[102] T Buckley, "Man, 22, Immolates Himself in Antiwar Protest at U.N.," *New York Times,* 10 November 1965, p. 1.
[103] Associated Press, *"*Indiana Woman, Worried About War, Found with Clothing Afire*," Rushville Republican* (Rushville, IN), p. 2. Mrs. Jankowski's husband reported in the article that his wife was, "deeply concerned about the Viet Nam situation," and had suggested they both self-immolate.
[104] Associated Press, "Pacifist Fights for Life After Protest," *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), 10 November 1965, p. 1.
[105] *"*Protests – And Now the Vietnik*," TIME Magazine*, 22 October 1965, p. 25A.

decision must be looked at from this point of view.[106] There is little evidence as to the veracity of Bundy's view; it is hardly possible to look at the effects of a single article, but it was nevertheless taken into account by Johnson following the memorandum's receipt, and certainly confirms the administration's bias against perceived negativity in the press. Bundy's view on the *Look* article exemplifies some of the earliest seeds of the siege mentality that would form within the Johnson staff against the press in later years. Bundy believed that a pause "will strengthen your hand both at home and abroad as a determined man of peace facing a very tough course in 1966," and noted, "We have a great interest in proving our own good faith as peace lovers." Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was also for the pause; Ball noted in his memorandum that the secretary recommended that the possibilities of pausing the bombing of North Vietnam needed to be explored. From a public relations standpoint, this was a strong move and had been correctly identified as such by Bundy. It was vital for Johnson to show that he was willing to negotiate to end the war, and by pausing the bombing he would also help to appease some of the anti-war protests that had been gathering in momentum. The deaths of Morrison and LaPorte received extensive media coverage at the start of November and coverage on the war from the likes of Joseph Alsop was critical of predicted massive rises in spending on defence in the following year's budget on 25 November. It was claimed that the increase in spending was at the heart of successful government pressure on aluminium and copper prices, a victory that was celebrated with what Alsop noted was "widespread excitement." Alsop's criticism made a connection between the government intervention on economic matters with events in Vietnam; Alsop's article foreshadowed the difficulty in balancing military spending with domestic programs; he noted that "[t]he real thing to fear is the ceiling on non-military spending which may well be imposed. The urban crisis, for example, very obviously demands an enormous augmentation of the existing program of federal aid to schools in deprived neighborhoods. It will be regrettable, though perhaps unavoidable, if such

[106] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, doc. 208, p. 583.

obvious needs cannot be promptly met."[107] This prediction would be prescient in the later years of the administration as the urban crisis deteriorated into race riots across the country.

As it was the administration were keenly aware of what the future held in Vietnam in terms of troop losses. McNamara predicted on 30 November 1965 that by early 1967 over 1000 soldiers would be killed in action in Vietnam every month.[108] This had the potential to cause a propaganda problem for the man who just over a year earlier noted that he was not about to send American boys 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys should be doing for themselves.[109] This was a short sighted view not just of the potential conflict, but of the potential for losing credibility with the electorate; just twelve months after his "man of peace" stance against the hard-line Barry Goldwater, Johnson found himself embroiled in what was increasingly looking like a long-term war with a high human cost. For his part Bundy continued to push the idea of a pause to Johnson, noting on 4 December that favourable consensus was growing in the administration for the tactic, which was, "the best single way of keeping it clear that Johnson is for peace, while Ho [Chi Minh] is for war."[110] Johnson pushed for more information on the pause from McNamara and Bundy at a meeting in Texas on 7 December.[111] It would be wrong to say that a December bombing pause was universally favoured, however; the Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously opposed halting bombing and Joe Califano sent the President a message on 13 December to confirm his own opposition to such an action, although he conceded that a "dramatic peace gesture," was necessary.[112] While it is not out of the ordinary to see differences in opinion within an administration, it is notable that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest and most important military figures in the country, strongly disagreed with the State Department and with McNamara. It is therefore easy to see how Johnson found

[107] J Alsop, "Spending Ceiling May Cause Crisis," *Salina Journal (*Salina, KS*)*, 25 November 1965, p. 5
[108] Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, *FRUS*, *1964-1968*, vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, document 212, 30 November 1965, p. 592.
[109] See chapter two for full details of the context of this statement.
[110] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, *FRUS*, *1964-1968,* vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, doc. 215, 4 December 1965, p. 600.
[111] McGeorge Bundy, Personal Notes of Meeting with President Johnson, LBJ Ranch, Texas, *FRUS*, *1964-1968,* vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, document 223, 7 December 1965, pp 619-620.
[112] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Califano) to President Johnson, *FRUS*, *1964-1968,* vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, doc. 228, 13 December 1965 p. 638.

himself in difficulty. There is a dearth of documents indicating Johnson's official position during these negotiations, but he noted in a telephone conversation about the length of the pause with General Maxwell Taylor on 17 December, "the man on the street feels that we have not done enough on the political side."[113] He also noted that in a recent Gallup Poll 43% of people thought US political efforts in Vietnam had been inadequate.[114] Tellingly, Johnson confessed to Taylor that he could feel the ice slipping from under him domestically because of Vietnam and that this would be a major factor in 1966's midterm elections – something that did indeed come to pass the following year.

After weeks of discussions, the bombing pause eventually began on Christmas Eve and would last until the end of January. Both Johnson and the key members of his administration were clearly keenly aware of the likelihood of further problems with public image at the end of 1965. While the President still held a strong approval rating at the end of the year[115], the signs of popular dissent were growing and the short-term strategies that Johnson used to win the elections in 1964 were beginning to create a credibility gap. Spragens has noted that in his analysis, Johnson made a good attempt at fostering media relations during his early presidency and that the credibility gap term was a poor reflection of the work that was done, but the analysis of this chapter shows that this was not the case.[116] Most notably, his denunciation of Barry Goldwater as a pro-war candidate even while his administration drafted and enacted the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which allowed America to go to war would soon come back to haunt him. His apparently reactive strategy towards press criticism and the apparent inability of both the President and his inner circle to create an effective press management strategy would come increasingly under the microscope.

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[113] Telephone call between President Johnson and General Maxwell Taylor, 17 December 1965 at 20:56, LBJ Library published telephone recordings, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYXediz8gek
(It is not clear where Taylor got this information.).
[114] A copy of this poll can be found in Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1976.
[115] Gallup poll taking ending on 16 December had Johnson at an overall job rating of 62%, with 22% disapproving. Found in Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1977.
[116] W C Spragens, "The Myth of the Johnson 'Credibility Gap,'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Fall 1980), p. 629.

Of 1965 it can be reasonably concluded that while Johnson's credibility with the wider public did not decline, his standing amongst journalists did, and the seeds of his long-term decline in credibility were certainly sown by his failure to develop a strong, proactive press strategy. His administration's reactive tendencies had been picked up on internally by the likes of James Greenfield and externally by key members of the press, and were not been acted upon by the President or any of his close advisors. Ultimately, Johnson's performance in 1965 was strong on paper – his popularity, as judged by the pollsters, remained strong and he enjoyed the support of his party moving into 1966, but as we have seen, the overarching strategy of the administration was to react, rather than act first, and this would cause problems in 1966.

Chapter 4: 1966 – Widening Credibility Gap and Sliding Popularity

Johnson's approval ratings at the end of 1965 were undoubtedly high, but 1966 was to be a crucial year in terms of his continuing popularity and there was a strong need for a cohesive public relations strategy that encompassed the entirety of the domestic and foreign policy issues the president had to deal with. 1966 was to be a watershed year for the administration as a whole; the bombing halt that was announced towards the end of the previous year would end on 31 January, leading to renewed criticism of the administration. Johnson would face growing reports of a "credibility gap" from the media for the first time. While this phrase was used in 1965 it really began to build momentum as 1966 dawned – the issue became such a talking point that the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations led by Johnson's former ally in the Democratic Party, Senator J. William Fulbright [D-Arkansas], called several members of the administration to testify in front of them. Johnson attended several important conferences and events in 1966 – most important were the Honolulu conference with senior officials on Vietnam in February and a whirlwind tour of Asia and surrounding countries such as Australia in October and November. Johnson also dealt with rising public unrest over domestic policies, particularly economic policies. The administration had to navigate several changes in personnel, as key advisors such as McGeorge Bundy and Jack Valenti moved on to become president of the Ford Foundation and head of the Motion Picture Association of America, respectively.

The problems that were building for Johnson in the second half of 1965 did not cease and the administration did not pause for breath; no government receives a blank slate at the beginning of a new year and this was certainly the case in the winter of 1965/66. Vietnam was on the minds of many Johnson advisors, and 3 January saw the press release of Defense Secretary Dean Rusk's "14

points," a plan to sue for peace with the North Vietnamese during the bombing halt.[1] McGeorge Bundy noted in a memorandum to Johnson that morning that a "reaction of affirmative interest," was developing; he strongly suggested that the administration push the fourteen points as a solid basis for peace talks and "challenge" anyone who disagreed. Bundy's choice of language is interesting; he discusses challenging the media and notes that Rusk's points had "only begun" to receive the attention they deserved.[2] This is indicative of the Johnson administration's attitude towards the media, particularly in terms of the Vietnam War at the start of 1966. A defensive stance was assumed even before the media had the time to fully react to the news, showing the nature of the Johnson administration as it moved more quickly towards a more besieged, wary stance in general. While Bundy noted that the attention was positive, he also warned that a firm position should be taken on the matter. Evidence of short-term thinking resurfaces here; the administration should have worked out its public position on the fourteen points and how they fitted with current foreign policy towards Vietnam before releasing them. That this was not, or does not appear to have been, put into effect highlights the constantly changing nature of the Johnsonian relationship with the press, and is indicative of a major failing by the administration to arrive at an effective press strategy and stick with it.

Johnson himself noted poll results in a National Security Council meeting on 5 January which showed that "73% of the American people wanted us to increase our diplomatic efforts" in Vietnam.[3] Johnson does not go into detail on this poll, but his willingness to point to opinion poll data is further evidence of short-term thinking. By using poll data in this way, Johnson showed that he was sensitive to changing public opinion and seemed to be willing to change his strategy based on the shifting goalposts of measured public opinion, with all of the difficulties that entailed. The

[1] For Rusk's Fourteen Points, see Paper by Secretary of State Rusk, Appendix A, in *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1964–1968*, vol. III, Vietnam, June–December 1965, doc. 247, 28 December 1965.
[2] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs [M. Bundy] to President Johnson, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 2, 3 January 1966, p. 5.
[3] B. Smith, Summary Notes of the 555th Meeting of the National Security Council, "Peace Offensive Regarding Vietnam," *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, 5 January 1966, p.19. Johnson does not explicitly state where these results came from, or when the poll was taken.

unreliable and constantly shifting nature of the public's view meant that basing strategy on something so difficult to quantify was a potentially dangerous and short-sighted move on the part of the president. Such vigilance can actually work to the advantage of a candidate for political office, especially in an election situation. Clark Clifford noted in his memoirs that Johnson and his team, "Worked constantly on tactics, speeches and strategy," during the 1964 election and this strategy allowed Johnson to maintain his high approval levels for some time. However, by 1966 the idea of a credibility gap, within which Johnson was portrayed as having misled or withheld information from the press and public concerning Vietnam began to gather steam and this was partly because of his tendency to chase favourable reportage and opinion poll results.[4]

By withholding information from the public, Johnson ensured his short-term future and good opinion poll ratings temporarily, but yet again did not appear to be thinking with a long-term strategy in mind. Johnson pointed out in the NSC meeting that Rusk had been to "200 conferences" in the previous year to try to kick-start negotiations; this cannot be tracked and proven but, if true, this was not heavily publicised by the administration, showing a lack of foresight from Johnson and his press office. It is more likely that the number was exaggerated by Johnson for effect – Rusk was undoubtedly a motivated individual, but this would have been an impossible task. Finally, Bundy warned in his communication that attention would turn to the State of the Union Address to be given at the end of the week. This was being taken seriously by all involved; Special Assistant to the President Joe Califano was hard at work collecting information from all areas of the government for ideas to flesh out the Address, taking over the job handled by Bill Moyers the previous year. A letter sent in Johnson's name requested the assistance of the heads of departments and agencies, "in developing and perfecting imaginative programs which will maintain our security, continue our prosperity, and improve the quality of life for all."[5]

[4] C Clifford, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 398.
[5] Memorandum from the President to the Heads of Departments and Agencies, undated, p.1, Statements of Lyndon B Johnson Collection, box 136, Lyndon B Johnson Library, Austin, Texas [LBJ Library].

It was well noted by the team of writers and researchers who worked on the State of the Union Address that discussion on Vietnam was important; nobody wanted further anti-draft protests and unrest similar to that seen in 1965. There was some concern in the speechwriting team over Johnson's reputation as an international statesman – Walt Rostow stated this in blunt terms during a conversation with Bundy and Califano on the speech, and to this end it was decided by Jack Valenti that a slogan was needed to sum up US goals in South East Asia.[6] Something was needed that would do for foreign policy what the Great Society had done for domestic legislation. Valenti called this a "Meaningful handle," and hoped that it would galvanise American public opinion behind Johnson's future foreign policy decision-making.[7] Bundy emphasised the need for the speech to be precise in its weighting; it was vital that Johnson not focus too hard on Vietnam or his detractors would accuse him of ignoring domestic issues in favour of an unpopular war. Bundy suggested that "75% foreign policy against 25% domestic policy would be significant" and strongly advised that the President not "Pause and wait upon Vietnam," something which was echoed by the attendees of Valenti's meeting on the foreign policy section of the address.[8] It was, however, necessary for a high percentage of the address to be focused on the war. Whether Johnson liked it or not it was now among the largest issues in American society and any reticence on his part to address this fact would most likely have been taken as a point of weakness by the growing number of detractors, on both the "hawk" and "dove" sides of the war.

That Johnson was being pulled in two directions by the pro- and anti-war campaigns is important to note; one of the difficulties in creating and following through with a coherent and comprehensive strategy during this time was the sheer weight of opposition which would be encountered, regardless of what position was taken. Johnson could not please everyone, and the administration

[6] For Rostow's comments, see Memorandum from W. W. Rostow to McGeorge Bundy and Joseph Califano, 3 November 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 177, LBJ Library, p. 1.
[7] Jack Valenti, Meeting on Foreign Policy Section, State of the Union Message, 13 November 1965, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 177, LBJ Library [Valenti's Meeting Notes].
[8] McGeorge Bundy, quoted in Valenti's Meeting Notes.

had difficulty in coming to a conclusion on the best public relations strategy when there were so many conflicting opinions being aired in the mainstream press. This was highlighted by the speechwriting process for the 1966 State of the Union Address, which was ongoing until the last minute; speechwriter Richard Goodwin enquired in a memorandum to Johnson two days before the speech as to whether the president "Finally" signed off on the foreign section.[9] The final speech would see Johnson forcefully reminded of how important the conflict in South East Asia was, while also delivering a fairly stark message to all the listening parties: hawks and doves, politicians, press and public. He began the concluding section of the speech, "But over it all – wealth, and promise, and expectation – lies our troubling awareness of American men at war tonight." It is clear that both he and his administration were keenly aware of the importance of a strong message on Vietnam in the first key address of 1966.[10]

Discussions between the president and key staff members such as Bundy and Undersecretary of State George Ball on the wording of the speech with regards to US contact with Hanoi were still in progress as late as 2.25pm on the day of the speech – 12 January.[11] Some in the administration were still wary of potential hostility and several of the speechwriters were reluctant to address criticism, particularly Valenti, who led the creation of the foreign policy section. On 7 January, he criticised a draft of the speech sent from Bundy: "On page 7 there is a paragraph about our peace offensive not being a propaganda trick. Don't you think that by surfacing this criticism, we lend a little credence to it?"[12] This is an example of the administration's tendency to avoid critical lines of thought, even though it was aware of them – as we have repeatedly seen throughout his presidency. Rather than addressing critics, Johnson often raged at them in private and simply

[9] Memorandum for the President from Richard Goodwin, 10 January 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 177, p. 1, LBJ Library.
[10] L B Johnson, Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, 12 January 1966, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1966, Book I (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 12.
[11] Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and the Under Secretary of State (Ball), *FRUS, 1964-1*968 vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, document 19, 12 January 1966, pp. 56-57.
[12] Memorandum from Jack Valenti to McGeorge Bundy, 7 January 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 177, LBJ Library, p. 1.

stopped speaking to members of the press who personally offended him. His brother Sam Houston Johnson, who acquired a reputation for being able to deal with Lyndon's mercurial temper, describes several incidents during which the president reacted badly to press criticism for what he, himself, saw as innocuous transgressions, such as swimming naked in the White House pool.[13] Sam Johnson's language – discussing "snob" reporters – shows that he agreed with Lyndon's summary of the press and their intentions (or, at least, that he recognised that it was important to his brother that he agree with him). As a commentator on Lyndon Johnson's affairs during his presidency, Sam Johnson is clearly a biased source, but the insights he offered show very clearly the siege mentality that Lyndon Johnson adopted dealing with the press. The arguments propagated by authors such as Kathleen Turner, Mark Updegrove and Robert Dallek among others that Johnson could not handle the press and treated them as a political actor, rather than a separate entity, are not without foundation. Sam Johnson's words are confirmed by James Edward Pollard, a longstanding observer of this area of American politics, who noted as early as 1964 that Johnson's sensitivity to criticism had been picked up on by the press.[14]

Kathleen Turner has similarly noted that Johnson's State of the Union Address was the first of his presidency to emphasise foreign affairs over domestic issues, and points out Lady Bird Johnson's comments following the speech that the audience were not enamoured with her husband's message.[15] The overall reaction to the speech was tepid, and exemplified by E. W. Kenworthy's reporting in the *New York Times* of the Republican Party's mixed reaction to Johnson's plans.[16] Despite this, and as the name of the article – "G. O. P. Backs President on Vietnam," – suggests, the Republicans supported the president on his Vietnam stance, and this was a victory for

[13] S H Johnson, *My Brother Lyndon* (Spokane: Cowles, 1967), pp. 192-96.
[14] J E Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press: Truman to Johnson* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1967). Chapter 9 deals with Johnson's transition to president and his sensitivity is noted on more than one occasion. Pollard had published his first analysis of the relationship between the press and the presidency in 1947. See *J E. Pollard, The Presidents and the Press* (New York: Macmillan, 1947). Turner frequently mentions Johnson's sensitivity in *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*. Dallek and Updegrove also mention his difficulties in dealing with press criticism, if less frequently, in their biographies of the president.
[15] Lady Bird Johnson, quoted in K. J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 154.
[16] E. W. Kenworthy, "G.O.P. Backs President on Vietnam," *New York Times*, 13 January 1966, p. 14.

Johnson. It is also worth noting that the newspaper's editorial was comprehensively in favour of the speech, concluding, "This is a good message, now it is up to the Legislature to act on it."[17] Good press such as this would become exceedingly rare as the year progressed and Johnson's opinion polls began to slide, but the State of the Union message seemed to have achieved its goal in the meantime. With that said, the address was difficult to review in the immediate aftermath of its delivery; only by taking into account how well Johnson followed through on his statement can it be fully evaluated as a strong or weak piece of rhetoric. As the rest of the year progressed, it would become clear that the State of the Union was not as strong and influential as initially hoped. As we will see, Johnson's sliding popularity can be attributed to a number of factors throughout the year, not the least of which was the consistently poor and reactive strategy towards Vietnam that would become prominent within weeks of the State of the Union speech.

Vietnam took centre stage during the first month of 1966; as much as the President wanted to concentrate on the Great Society, he found himself bogged down by the bombing halt, and the groups of both hawks and doves who disagreed with his actions. The halt was extended to 31 January, which attracted criticism from hawks, particularly in government, while the eventual decision to resume bombing at the end of January drew criticism from high profile doves, particularly in the written press. Two articles in the *New York Times* exemplify the situation. The first was from 9 January in which Japanese Premier Eisaku Sato was reported to have urged the Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman to continue the bombing halt while Japan approached the Soviet Union with peace terms.[18] The second article, from 23 January, was "a virtual plea" from US Chief of Staff of the Army (and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, to bring the bombing halt to an end and resume the assault on North Vietnam. Wheeler asserted in congressional testimony: "If you stop bombing North Vietnam, in effect you throw one of your blue

[17] "The State of the Union," *New York Times*, 13 January 1966, p. 24.
[18] Emerson Chaplin, "Sato Now Urging U.S. Extend Pause," *New York Times*, 9 January 1966, p. 2.

chips for negotiation over your shoulder."[19] With such vastly mixed messages from politicians and military experts from both within America and from the watching international community, it is not surprising that public opinion in the United States was deeply divided. While it is true that Johnson did not have an adequate pro-active approach towards press reporting of the Vietnam situation, it is perhaps more difficult to place the blame for this specifically on his own head. The confused nature of American public opinion on Vietnam is even further shown by the letters chosen for publication by *TIME Magazine* on 14 January, 1966. In consecutive letters the magazine's choice of Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of US forces in Vietnam, as Man of the Year for 1965 was called "[T]he greatest tribute anyone has paid our men fighting in Viet Nam… *TIME's* thank you to the men dying for our lives," and "outrageous and offensive to all who work and pray for peace."[20] It is clear that by 1966, the issue of Vietnam deeply divided the national consciousness of the United States and that Johnson did not know how to react.

Johnson's speech confirming the end of the bombing pause on 31 January was broadcast to the American public on the same day.[21] James "Scotty" Reston, who Johnson previously trusted to write pro-government stories, but was no longer "In Johnson's pocket," as Democratic political advisor James Rowe put it, wrote an article expressing his feelings on the resumption of bombing in North Vietnam.[22] "What evidence is there," asked Reston, "that raising the level of violence will do any better now than it has done in the past?"[23] This was the kind of article that Johnson found borderline unpatriotic in its questioning of the American government – Reston would publish a similar article later in the year that angered the president to the point of asking an aide to call

[19] Jack Raymond, "Wheeler Favors Further Bombing of North Vietnam," *New York Times*, 23 January, 1966, p. 1.
[20] P J Molay and Y Krasna, "Letters to the Editor," *TIME Magazine*, 14 January 1966, p. 17. The Man of the Year cover appeared on the 7 January 1966 issue, with a full article detailing the reasoning behind the award. See Appendix A for a copy of the cover.
[21] A full transcript, video and audio recording of this message is in the University of Virginia's Miller Center's Presidency Project archives, and online at http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-5936
[22] Memorandum from Rowe to Johnson, undated, in Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War,* p. 117.
[23] J Reston, "The Bombing Decision: More U.S. Troops in Vietnam Foreseen, But Not Attacks on Hanoi or Haiphong," *New York Times*, 1 February 1966, p.42 .

Reston up and make him aware that Johnson found him "Dishonest and untruthful."[24] The resumption of bombing was indicative of the kind of decision that Johnson had to make regularly with regard to Vietnam; decisions which would undoubtedly alienate a group of either hawks or doves. Without a coherent, decisive media strategy, he was unable to properly articulate his actions and this contributed to the nosedive that his popularity would take as 1966 wore on. Reston's article and Johnson's reaction to it illustrates this point and shows how the president struggled to accept that there would most likely be criticism of his actions, making it difficult to have a clear enough head to strategise against unfavourable press coverage. Turner argues that Johnson's thin skin and inability to take the pressure of criticism was one of the biggest factors in his difficulties with the press, while Sam Houston Johnson turned this around, believing that the press were unnecessarily harsh on his brother. The truth is somewhere between these polar opposites. It is true that Johnson was not media friendly and had difficulty accepting bad press; it is also true that the press found it difficult to work with Johnson, which led to negative publicity. The first months of 1966 reinforced the lines that was drawn since Johnson took the presidency; with public opinion beginning to free fall, the press were given more free rein than ever to go after Johnson.

Johnson directed Dean Rusk to tell the press very little regarding the bombing resumption as January progressed; in a meeting of key advisors on 20 January, the almost verbatim notes show that he asked that Rusk tell the press: "It's been 26 days since cease bombing. Harriman has been to 11 Capitals. Goldberg and I, too, plus 113 nations. We know we've done everything we can do and should do to talk rather than fight. Adequate time to reply—nothing encouraging—we don't want to mislead American public."[25] He added that he would like to see headlines in the following day's papers proclaiming that "The peace jig is up," and he gave away his mistrust of the press by commenting, "We don't have to say everything we know to newspapers." Because this was a meeting of key, trusted staff members, such as Valenti, Moyers and Rusk, the president was able to

[24] Quoted in Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 168.
[25] Notes of Meeting, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 32, January 1966, p. 99.

give vent to anger to some degree about issues with the press without being seriously challenged. Several of his staffers agreed with his point of view, including Jack Valenti; 'every day," Valenti once admonished, "the president uneasily imagines himself in danger of ambush by nosy newsmen who ought to be praising him instead of criticizing him."[26] Only George Ball would argue against the bombing resumption, forwarding two papers to the president following this meeting which argued that resuming bombing against North Vietnam have the dual impact of increasing the likelihood of escalation and failing to induce Hanoi to commit to discussions and cease their own aggression. In the discussions about resumption that followed this meeting, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy had the president's ear, and he urged a prompt resumption of the bombing. Bundy acknowledged the positives of waiting, but argued that doves would talk of delay but "always oppose any resumption," that the Republicans would make headway with their own criticisms of Johnson's administration if he appeared to dither on bombing. Moreover, waiting further would cause problems for the troops already on the ground.[27] Bundy's thesis ran entirely counter to Ball's arguments and Johnson eventually took Bundy's advice; the bombing of North Vietnam resumed on 31 January and was announced in a broadcast by Johnson from the White House at 10am. He concluded with the comment that Secretary Rusk was to meet with the press to brief them and give the country, "and the entire world a thorough and comprehensive account of all of the diplomatic efforts conducted in these last five weeks in our continuing policy of peace and freedom for South Vietnam."[28]

Johnson's press relations focused on what had already been done behind the scenes to facilitate peace in Vietnam. The press were informed of efforts that were made over the previous 37

[26] J Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 206.
[27] The arguments for and against were summed up in a memorandum from Bundy to Johnson on 24 January. See Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, 24 January 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vietnam, 1966, vol. IV, doc. 39, p. 125.
[28] L B Johnson, Statement by The President Announcing the Resumption of Air Strikes on North Vietnam, 31 January 1966, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, p. 39. A full transcript, video and audio recording of this message is in the University of Virginia's Miller Center's Presidency Project archives, and online at http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-5936.

days of paused bombing to reach out to the Viet Cong leader Ho Chi Minh and begin talks; in the meeting on 20 January, Johnson mentioned speaking to 113 nations and the visit of Averell Harriman to 11 capitals in an information-seeking capacity. While the efforts to bring the North Vietnamese to the table were no doubt valiant, the important note is that they were not publicised until after the fact. Johnson kept the public in the dark as to what the Americans were doing to promote peace. A mere paragraph of the president's State of the Union Address was devoted to the post-bombing pause peace campaign, and even this mentioned both "Public statements and private communications," which could only have given the impression of a president keeping secrets from the electorate.

Johnson's style of dealing with those around him on a "need to know" basis was no longer working as well as in his years in the Senate; he was no longer able to withhold information as he saw fit and he had not yet adapted his strategy to avoid the opening of a credibility gap by 1966. This was not helped by the staff members he surrounded himself with, particularly the likes of McGeorge Bundy, who appeared to be equally mistrustful of the press and its motives and who, in times of crisis, looked inwards to try to resolve internal problems rather than trying to foster a two-way communication channel with the administration's critics. It was important at this critical juncture in Johnson's presidency that he be open and honest with the press, and address the criticisms which began in earnest over his secretive style. Once again, however, the opening month of 1966 saw Johnson and his advisors regress into his mistrust of the fourth estate, and this would only hamper him in the coming months. Not only that, but the tactics of the administration yet again showed a reactive element; rather than advertise and sell the efforts of their attempts to bring the North Vietnamese to the table, only the fruitless results of this effort were shown to the public. A pro-active approach to this scenario may have mitigated much of the criticism that was levelled at Johnson from both the media and the public regarding his guarded nature. By once again falling into the trap of using a reactive strategy towards media coverage, the administration did not give itself a chance to pre-emptively move against its critics, and opened itself up to scathing criticism for its

handling of the ceasefire, both at the time and later in the presidency, as pressure began to mount concerning Johnson's handling of the war.

In terms of the war, the next big issue on Johnson's mind was the Honolulu conference in early February. On 31 January, Jack Valenti wrote a memorandum to Johnson overtly suggesting the use of the Honolulu conference as a place to make a good impression on the world's media; point five of his six-point message stated:

> But most important, the President could appear with [South Vietnamese] Prime Minister [Nguyen Cao] Ky and stress the political, economic and social future of South Vietnam once the fighting has stopped. Perhaps economic news could be announced here – some specifics on the Mekong River project – housing projects – land reform – such a meeting could serve as a focal point for showing how bright the future for South Vietnam could be – and indeed a future for all of Southeast Asia.[29]

Clearly then, the President's staff saw Honolulu as an opportunity to make an impression on the world, and to promote the Johnsonian vision for Vietnam in a post-war climate. It was also important, on the day that the bombing resumption was announced, to have a contingency plan in place to ensure that public opinion was not significantly affected by the news of renewed hostilities in Vietnam. Valenti also suggested writing to the Pope and briefing members of the cabinet in order to increase visibility and transparency over the course of action in Vietnam; notably Valenti commented that, "As Senator Clinton P. Anderson [D-New Mexico] told me, there are many Senators and Congressmen who have not had the opportunity to hear the briefings of Secretaries Rusk and McNamara.[30] That Anderson, who was an important member of the Democratic Party, was not up to speed on the plans of the president and the decision to resume bombing before the public

[29] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Valenti) to President Johnson, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 58, 31 January 1966, p. 194.
[30] Memorandum from Valenti to Johnson, 31 January 1966.

announcement is interesting to note; Johnson favoured secrecy, not only with the press and public, but also with key members of his own party. Karnow notes that he surrounded himself with congressional loyalists increasingly during 1966 and beyond, implying strongly that those who were not with the president were systematically set aside as pressure and criticism began to mount and were removed from the administration's decision-making processes.[31]

Despite Valenti's suggestion, Johnson appeared to have other ideas. He called Secretary of State Dean Rusk on 3 February and stated that he did not "want any other human to know this… but I think I would like to go out to Honolulu on Saturday night with you and Bob [McNamara]." He observed that this trip would be "Just the most secret thing that we can have in the State Department."[32] This is yet another example of Johnson's preference for secrecy; his intention was as stated by Valenti; to go to Honolulu himself to discuss matters of Vietnam, but rather than do as his aide suggested and use the occasion to his advantage and court the world's media, he apparently did not want it publicised that he was going to do this. Notably on the same day, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee decided to hold televised hearings on Johnson's request in the budget for $400 million in supplementary foreign aid funds for Vietnam. Five men were interviewed, Agency for International Development Administrator David Bell on 4 February; General James Gavin on 8 February; former Ambassador George Kennan on February 10; General Maxwell Taylor on 17 February; and Dean Rusk on 18 February.[33] Johnson noted after the first day of hearings to Postmaster General (and Democratic Party strategist) Larry F. O'Brien that this was "A very, very

[31] S Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (London: Century, 1983), p. 484.
[32] Telephone conversation between President Johnson and Secretary of State Rusk, 3 February 1966, FRUS 1964-68, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 63, pp. 203-04.
[33] The testimony of these men can be found in several places; a video recording of Taylor's testimony is available for view via C-Span; https://www.c-span.org/video/?404585-1/1966-fulbright-vietnam-hearings-general-maxwell-taylor with a further video of Rusk's appearance before the committee is also available; https://www.c-span.org/video/?404584-1/1966-fulbright-vietnam-hearings-dean-rusk and transcripts of all interviews are available in the work "*The Vietnam Hearings: The Complete Statements of Dean Rusk, James M Gavin, George F Kennan, Maxwell D Taylor with extensive excerpts from their testimonies,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

disastrous break."[34] He noted that Senators Mike Mansfield [D-Montana] and J. William Fulbright [D-Arkansas], in particular, "Could kill all of our legislation."[35] Mansfield was the Majority Leader and carried some power within the Senate. The Honolulu conference and Congressional Hearings on the war would now become the most important aspects of Vietnam from a public relations point of view for Johnson; it became important for him to make a strong statement about his views on Vietnam and exert as much influence as possible while Congress held its hearings. Fulbright, the chair of the Committee on Foreign Relations, completed his break from Johnson's political side that began following the adoption of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and would in the same year publish his harshly critical work on Vietnam, *The Arrogance of Power*. Fulbright felt duped over Johnson's manipulation of him during the Gulf of Tonkin crisis and had by now adopted an anti-war stance. Mansfield for his part was also against conflict in Vietnam.[36] The committee membership also included Senator Wayne Morse [D-Oregon], one of only two senators (the other was Ernest Gruening [D-Alaska]) to vote against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, who was staunchly anti-war throughout the escalating conflict.[37] The committee members were able to take strength from the growing unease over the war in the Senate. With figures such as Mansfield showing their lack of support it was clear that Fulbright and Morse felt confident enough in receiving support from their colleagues in the Senate to investigate the Johnson administration's actions in Vietnam to conduct a public hearing on the matter.

Johnson was certainly keenly aware of the antagonising forces within the committee, and it now became vitally important to head them off in the arena of public opinion. Turner notes that

[34] Telephone conversation cited in Editor's Note, *FRUS 1964-68*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 64, 5 February 1966, p. 207.
[35] A full transcript of the conversation between LBJ and O'Brien is available on YouTube, courtesy of the LBJ Presidential Library at the following location; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5Hs3bERos8.
[36] On events that soured the Fulbright-Johnson relationship, see discussion of the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis in Chapter 2.
[37] On the testimony of the five men, with supporting documents and the list of Committee members, see *Supplemental foreign assistance, fiscal year, 1966: Vietnam: hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eighty-ninth Congress, second session, on S. 2793, to amend further the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended : 28 January, 4, 8, 10, 17 and 18 February, 1966*. As accessed on 4 February 2017 at catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/010309694.

Fulbright was seeking to have his own concerns about Vietnam heard by the nation at large, and while the committee was unsuccessful in having the Gulf of Tonkin resolution repealed, its hearings did bring Senate discontent to the fore and solidify much of the dissent that was brewing politically against Johnson's war policies.[38] If the hearings solidified Senate discontent, the White House response was to speed up its attempts to spread the Vietnam war message to press and public. The soon-to-depart McGeorge Bundy and Vice President Humphrey were sent to defend the President's policies on "Meet the Press," a national television show aired by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) since 1947, in which politicians took questions from members of the press and other commentators.[39] But, once again, we find Johnson's press strategy working in terms of the administration's response and the addressing of questions that the press were already asking, public or other areas of American politics. With the committee hearings, as with many other major challenges to Johnson's authority during this period, the administration simply did not have a pro-active method of dealing with the questions of critics. The administration found themselves answering serious questions about their actions in Vietnam; the hearings had clear potential to damage the integrity and credibility of the government. Johnson seemed to have no other plan of action than to deal with the actions of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations after the potential damage was done in the hearings – this once again showed a reactive attitude from Johnson. A pro-active approach could have seen Johnson moving out in front of the likes of Fulbright with a strong plan of action for Vietnam or even update on the progress of the war, but this did not happen. Johnson's proclamation that "the tide is turning" in the war came at a dinner in New York City during which he received the National Freedom Award – six days after the Committee

[38] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, pp. 155-57 discusses the effect of the congressional hearings on Johnson.

[39] McGeorge Bundy left in early 1966 to become president of the Ford Foundation. Gordon Goldstein's biography on Bundy, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Holt, 2009), is an excellent account of his life in the Johnson administration; for a further account of the lives of McGeorge and his brother William, see Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999). Bundy's exit is also mentioned by Turner in *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War* p. 157; the full interview with Humphrey and Bundy is available from the Library of Congress.

interviewed Dean Rusk – was a feeble attempt to draw attention from the hearings. Scotty Reston wrote in the *New York Times* on 25 February that the speech was a symbol of the "tragedy" of his leadership; Reston noted that Johnson's remarks were full of contradictions and that the president, "looked troubled and sounded harried in New York."[40] Once again the Johnsonian mistrust of his enemies and disinclination to reveal information to the public was causing him problems. In his discussion with O'Brien on 5 February, Johnson intimated that Rusk needed to work hard in a discussion with Fulbright not to reveal information, noting that, "What you get into, in these open sessions on military matters, is if you give them information on the boys out there you endanger them, if you don't you're not responsive."[41] Once again, this is a fundamental marker of Johnson's mistrust of his enemies. This statement, much like several previously mentioned, shows how Johnson's world view appeared to be shifting to a siege mentality wherein the press and the public and sceptical politicians became the enemy, with the administration fighting against what they saw as an erroneous public perception propagated by an unfriendly press. Johnson's speech implies that regardless of what he did, there was no chance of winning universal approval; while this is true, it shows that Johnson could not make a decisive move for fear of losing more of the consensus he was now struggling to hold together.

Despite the further solidification of this attitude, Johnson was aware of the need to make changes and work to improve his public profile in the early part of the year. On 17 March Senator Everett Dirksen [R-Illinois] and Congressman Gerald Ford [R-Michigan], the House Minority Leader, used the term "credibility gap" (a play on the so-called "missile gap" Cold War coinage by John F. Kennedy in the late 1950s) to describe the administration's economic actions; the term would soon become common to describe Johnson's actions towards Vietnam. Dirksen advised the press that the

[40] J Reston, "New York: President Johnson's Dreams," *New York Times*, 25 February 1966, p. 30.
[41] Telephone conversation between LBJ and L F O'Brien, 5 February 1966, at 8.27am, provided by LBJ Library; accessed on 4 May 2017 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5Hs3bERos8.

G.O.P "did not invent the term credibility gap, but I guess we're going to use it a little."[42] To address criticisms about the credibility of information passed on by the administration and to mitigate the departure of key staff member McGeorge Bundy who became president of the Ford Foundation, Johnson appointed two special assistants in Robert Kintner and Walt Rostow. The appointments were announced to the public via the President's weekly press conference on 31 March. Kintner, a former executive with NBC, brought to the table what Johnson termed as, "Wide experience in public affairs, journalism, and executive management."[43] As a broadcaster and journalist, Kintner was exactly the kind of man Johnson needed to advise him on press strategies. Rostow moved up to the president's advisory staff from the Department of State to advise on foreign policy, while Kintner was announced as being more aimed at domestic affairs. Rostow saw himself as more of a counsellor to the president than an advisor on national security, and has been criticised in later years for skewing the flow of information that the president received.[44] At the same press conference, Johnson ominously answered a reporter's question on Vietnam: "I think that there is a very adequate free flow of information out there, and everything that is reported to this Government in that field is pretty well known to you."[45] In a private memorandum sent to senior cabinet members, Johnson also directed that Robert W. Komer be designated as Special Assistant to the President. He was described as "Blowtorch Bob," by South Vietnam ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge; the writer of his obituary called him, "a point man in the United States' star-crossed campaign to win hearts and minds in Vietnam," and claimed arguing with him was "like having a flamethrower aimed at the seat

[42] J D Morris, "G.O.P. Chiefs Score Use of Statistics," *New York Times*, 18 March 1966, p. 22. The "gap" device was used widely in this period. Kennedy also caused the term "muscle gap" to be used after noting a disparity between the athleticism of American youth and that of the USA's allies and enemies. See John F. Kennedy, "The Soft American," *Sports Illustrated*, 26 December 1960, at http://armymedicine.mil/Documents/Panel%20C%20-%201960-Kennedy-Soft-American.pdf and J M De Oca, "The 'Muscle Gap': Physical Education and US Fears of Depleted Masculinity, 1954-1963," in S Wagg and D L Andrews (eds.), *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 123-48.

[43] See President's News Conference of 31 March 1966, LBJ's Remarks on Vietnam, box 108, LBJ Library. Also available in the Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States series.

[44] For an in-depth analysis on Rostow's performance as National Security Advisor, and the advisory process under his supervision, see K V Mulcahy, "Walt Rostow as National Security Advisor, 1966-1969," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 223-36, and K V Mulcahy, "Rethinking Groupthink: Walt Rostow and the National Security Advisory Process in the Johnson Administration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 237-50.

[45] President's News Conference of 31 March 1966.

of one's pants," and noted that he possessed a "near religious faith in the power of facts and statistics," to win in Vietnam.[46] Komer's main job would be the "co-ordination and supervision in Washington of U.S. non-military programs for peaceful construction relating to Vietnam." Johnson also pointed out that Komer had a special interest in the progress of new initiatives to "attack" hunger, ignorance and disease in Southeast Asia.[47] Komer noted in his files that his appointment was the work of senior staff members Joe Califano and Bill Moyers, who had "worn down" members of the State Department who wanted to fit this job to their own conception of American action in Vietnam.[48]

This exchange shows two major issues with Johnsonian policy on Vietnam. Firstly, in not announcing Komer's new job role alongside the new appointments in his press conference, Lyndon Johnson missed a sparkling opportunity to advertise the good that was being done in Vietnam, and show that a cohesive strategy for rebuilding the country and improving infrastructure was being put into place, something which would in turn help the United States' exit strategy when the war came to a conclusion, and boost confidence in the administration's ability to end the war and deliver information to the public on progress in Southeast Asia. Komer's belief in the power of facts and statistics is important to note – it may have been prudent to have him work with Barry Zorthian, the almost legendary presenter of the "5 o'clock follies" news briefings in Vietnam, using some of those statistics. It seems that nobody, from Johnson down to his lower staff members, thought that this would be a way to boost opinion ratings or help press relations and this shows the entire administration to be out of touch with public sentiment on the matter. A Gallup poll taken in mid February 1966 and published early March put the president's approval rating on Vietnam at 50%.[49] The president's own job rating came in at 54% – a reasonable rating, but still far below what Johnson

[46] T Weiner, "Robert Komer, 78, Figure In Vietnam, Dies," *New York Times*, 12 April 2000, accessed online on 3 February 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/12/world/robert-komer-78-figure-in-vietnam-dies.html.
[47] National Security Action Memorandum no. 343, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 102, 28 March 1966, pp. 302-303.
[48] R Komer, quoted in K J Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 109.
[49] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1993.

previously enjoyed. It should be noted that approval ratings and job ratings do not necessarily mean the same thing; an approval rating measures popularity, while the job rating was intended to measure how well the public thought Johnson was performing in his role. A further poll published on 30 March showed improvement – Johnson's job rating came in at 58%, so perhaps the administration saw no reason to be alarmed.[50] But this is another case of a decidedly short-term strategy that was quickly becoming normal for Johnson and his staff. By not announcing an appointment such as this there was no retort when the already vocal criticisms of his Vietnam policy became more widespread, and he could not seem to understand why pointing to information that was suppressed, whether by design or not, did not placate his critics. The second problem with this communication is that it shows division within the administration; hawks in the administration such as Walt Rostow were very clearly not in favour of the pacification and rebuilding job that Komer had been appointed to do and the fact that they needed to be "worn down," as Komer put it, shows that this was the case. In fact, Rusk, himself, stated his concerns and objections in telephone calls with Califano and Moyers in the preceding days.[51] Without unity in the veteran staff members of the administration, the task of selling a war to the people of the United States became an impossible one.

Further to this identification of the need to do something about press coverage, the president also instructed Rusk, McNamara, Walt Rostow, Moyers and Jack Valenti that he wanted to "Invite publishers and editors to state dinners – and have them in earlier to lunch with the President and Rusk and McNamara."[52] In the background, a draft scenario prepared by the Department of Defense noted that, "the political situation is in 'terminal sickness' and even the military prognosis is of an escalating stalemate."[53] The argument that the Johnson administration knew of the basic futility of the war is not being contested in this dissertation, but it is still important to note it and this

[50] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 1998.
[51] Komer is quoted extensively in Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, pp. 107-109.
[52] Notes of meeting, Washington, *FRUS 1964-68*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, document 109, 2 April 1966, p. 316.
[53] Draft Scenario Prepared in the Department of Defense, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 114, 5 April 1966, pp. 327-28.

document is proof that the administration were made aware at an early stage that the war was likely to drag on for an extended period of time. Notably, the *New York Times* reported just days earlier that the administration suspended all congressional trips to South Vietnam amid concerns over the weakening political situation in the area at the time, "[d]ampening optimism" over the course of the war.[54] In terms of public relations, the administration should have moved quickly to quell fears while acknowledging the possibility of a longer war. Not doing this contributed to the credibility gap idea that had already been exploited by Everett Dirksen and opened the Johnson administration up to further criticism further down the line as it became clear that the public were misled on the likely duration of the war. This is further illustrated by newspaper reports of public unrest in the United States at the political situation in South Vietnam which began to filter out of the country during spring. On 27 May, the *New York Times* reported that the United States cultural centre and library was sacked and burned by Buddhist students protesting against American support for the South Vietnamese leader, Premier Ky. The report noted that the centre's director – Albert Ball – was more resigned than shocked when notified of the imminent attack, giving the impression to the readership of the *Times* that such an event was not uncommon against American forces in South Vietnam, and undoubtedly helping to turn the mood against the war in some readers.[55]

As criticism about the war increased, domestic matters once again took centre stage as the 1966 mid-term elections required the administration to begin to develop a strategy to ensure that Great Society plans were not foiled by a swing to the Republicans. On 11 May, a document by Kintner was sent to the president. Johnson previously approved an outline of plans that would improve, "the quality and coordination of Cabinet and sub-Cabinet speakers throughout the [midterm election] campaign."[56] It was vitally important for Johnson's domestic plans to ensure a

[54] J W Finney, "U.S. Defers Trips by Congressmen to South Vietnam," *New York Times*, 2 April 1966, p. 1, 3.
[55] R W Apple, Jr., "Buddhist Students Wreck American Center in Hue," *New York Times*, 27 May 1966, p. 1, 4. A UPI (United Press International) story titled *"*USIA Sacked By Students in Viet Nam*," Henderson Times-News* (Henderson, NC) on 26 May 1966, p. 1, notes that this very building had been destroyed twice in two years.
[56] Memorandum from Kintner to President Johnson, 11 May 1966, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, box 120, LBJ Library, p. 1.

Democratic victory in the midterm elections; any strong Republican gains would jeopardise the easy movement that Great Society programmes previously enjoyed through the American political system. The document came with a tick box asking Johnson to approve the draft remarks for a cabinet meeting the following Tuesday – there is no evidence that Johnson signed off on this. The document discusses in great detail important recent addresses that potential campaign speakers should have knowledge of in both domestic and foreign policy terms; notably the Honolulu conference of February and the president's request to resume bombing on 31 January and the Medical Assistance Program of 31 March and the Medicare Extension Bill signing of 8 April.[57]

At the end of 1965, Gallup polls conducted in December showed the president's approval rating on matters relating to the situation in Vietnam at 56%.[58] This was still a strong showing, given the conflicting news reportage discussed earlier in this chapter, especially that which surrounding the bombing pause. By the middle of 1966, the mood in the United States had shifted rapidly. A Harris poll published in early June announced that the public were getting more hostile over Vietnam – Harris felt that his poll findings reflected not an increase in the dove position, but increased militancy amongst the people and "a get it over with attitude," and further noted that "critics of Mr Johnson who argue that the escalation of the war in Viet Nam has been the wrong emphasis in the wrong place at the wrong time have not convinced American public opinion that the issue is as simple as that."[59] In August opinion polls favouring the President were hard to come by. A published Gallup Poll on 24 August showed Vietnam approval as down to 43%, with 39% now outright disapproving of the president's actions on the matter.[60] This indicated a significant slip as the Johnson's approval ratings now sat below 50% and would continue to do so on a regular basis for the rest of his presidency. Johnson was well known for carrying favourable opinion polls in his pocket and showing them to those who might question his policies; these were quickly becoming

[57] Ibid., p. 7.
[58] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 8 January 1966 p. 1982.
[59] L Harris, "Public Getting More Hostile Over Viet Nam," *Winona Daily News* (Winona, MN), 14 June 1966, p. 5
[60] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2024.

harder and harder for his staff to find.[61] However, Vietnam cannot be solely blamed for slipping job ratings. Hayes Redmon, who was dealing with the archiving and notification of the president when it came to poll results, received a memorandum from Bill Moyers on 24 August on polling in Florida; it notes that only a small proportion of "A good job," were shown to Johnson; several points of interest did not find their way to him. Redmon's job was described by Robert M Eisinger as relaying polls such as this to Moyers, who would "usually send a memo to President Johnson," for his night reading.[62]

The president's domestic policies now drew a lower favourable rating than his Vietnam actions; Moyers was able to explain this as Florida voters' upset over the pace of civil rights developments in the South.[63] This memorandum is an example of the difficulty in which the administration found itself in during the latter months of 1966; an inconsistent and reactive press strategy meant that almost 20% of voters in the Florida polls were unable to express opinions on recent American bombings in Hanoi and Haiphong, while 37% were outright unfavourable. Once again, Moyers had to step in to try and mitigate the President's declining popularity by trying to point out that few other U.S. leaders discussed in polling results "could be called popular,"[64] including the likes of Vice President Hubert Humphrey and John Kennedy. The President's civil rights legislation was quickly alienating voters in the southern states; Moyers' belief was certainly that this is why Florida voters were not warming to the President, and it was always going to be a struggle for Johnson to pressure the South into accepting civil rights legislation; for all of the big speeches about tolerance and equality that preceded the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voters Rights Act of 1965, the administration did not target the hardest to reach voters in states such as Alabama and, while this is understandable and perhaps even expected in the wake of the large scale support

[61] R Dallek mentions Johnson's penchant for doing this several times in *Lyndon B Johnson: Portrait of a President* (New York: Penguin, 2004), notably on p. 232.
[62] R M Eisinger, *The Evolution of Presidential Polling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 57.
[63] Memorandum from Bill Moyers to Hayes Redmon, 24 August 1966, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, box 340, LBJ Library, p. 1.
[64]Ibid., p. 2.

for these bills in the North, the likes of Moyers obviously felt that LBJ was feeling the wrath of white, Southern voters in opinion polls coming out of the South.

As the mid-term elections grew closer, the mood in the Democratic Party was that Vietnam was liable to hurt the party, if not specific party members, going forward. Senator Mike Mansfield sent Johnson details of a meeting between several important Democratic senators, including Richard Russell Jr. [D-Georgia], Fulbright, Ralph Yarborough [D-Texas], who served alongside LBJ as a representative from Texas before the latter became vice president in 1961, and Chief Majority Whip Russell B. Long [D-Louisiana].[65] Some of those present agreed that broadcasts from *CBS* (Columbia Broadcasting Service) journalist Eric Sevareid and *ABC* (American Broadcasting Corporation) newsman Bill Lawrence had been "very revealing… and suggest we have not, heretofore, been getting a complete and accurate picture of what has been happening in Vietnam." While the group were mixed on whether or not to pull out of Vietnam, Mansfield's summary of the political implications discussed was unanimously agreed with; the Democratic Party was being hurt, and would continue to be so if the war dragged on, people were no longer following the president with enthusiasm due to doubt over American objectives that was caused by the reactive and unclear relationship that developed between the president and the press, and the war was hampering the domestic programs of the administration. Mansfield concluded that Vietnam was now a worse situation than the Korean War.[66]

This meeting again illustrates several issues with the Johnsonian strategy of being secretive over the war; with elections coming up it was clear that important members of Congress were not informed about their own President's motives and goals in Vietnam. Much like the fallout from his public strategy, the President now faced criticism from within his own party over the credibility of

[65] It is also worth noting that Yarborough had been involved in a long running feud with Johnson's great Texan political ally, Governor John Connally. Richard Russell was a longstanding senator from Georgia with close ties to Johnson; Russell B. Long was the son of Huey Long, himself a former Louisiana governor and senator, and one of only two sitting U.S. senators to be assassinated. All of these men had strong political pedigrees.
[66] Memorandum from Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 166, 29 June 1966, p. 464.

the facts given out about the war, from more individuals than had opposed his previous plans and from outside the Committee on Foreign Relations. Johnsonian allies such as his political mentor, Richard B. Russell, found themselves with no information from the president on the war. With all of this having been said, Johnson took the opportunity on 14 August to announce to the waiting media that, "a communist military takeover in South Vietnam is no longer just improbable… it is impossible," while recounting a long conversation with General Westmoreland the previous evening.[67] However, Westmoreland, for his part, was evasive when asked whether his forces could begin to withdraw as early as 1968 – this illustrates even further the lack of connection between Johnson's statements and the reality of the situation.[68] Johnson aimed another shot at the press in remarks on the war made to the Navy League in Manchester, New Hampshire, on 20 August, noting on the subject of South Vietnamese elections, "I hope the press media will see that these activities are put in a goldfish bowl so that all of our people can observe the tactics the [Viet Cong] resort to – in assassinations, in terror, in infiltrations, in the massacres – in order to keep people from having a chance to vote in an election."[69] The barbed comment is clear; Johnson felt that too much negative press commentary was being given to the war and wanted to see what he felt was a more patriotic and, in his eyes, unbiased commentary about the enemy. As the election campaign continued, McNamara discussed a termination of bombing in North Vietnam, but noted that this should wait until after the election, for fear of a negative backlash.[70] Domestically, the President was suffering from the increasing inflation that became evident in the US economy, partially as a result of military spending in Vietnam. The 16 September issue of *TIME Magazine* noted that the president finally requested emergency action on the economy from Congress and contended that his critics charged that he should have acted sooner; many did not like Johnson's actions, some of which included of a

[67] "President Johnson and General Westmoreland Meet to Discuss the Situation in Viet-Nam," [no author] *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 55, 5 September 1966, p. 335.
[68] "General Westmoreland's News Conference," *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 55, 5 September 1966, p. 336.
[69] "Our Objective in Vietnam:" Address by President Johnson made before the Navy League at Manchester, N.H., transcript in the *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 55, 12 September 1966, p. 368.
[70] Telephone conversation between Secretary of Defense McNamara and President Johnson, 5.30pm, transcript in "Editorial Note," *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 240, 19 September 1966, p. 648.

temporary suspension of tax incentives and accelerated depreciation allowances for business investment in new equipment and construction.[71] The article noted that Senator Gerald Ford called the actions "belated fire fighting," and that holding back on Great Society programmes was now expected given that the President had vowed to cut federal spending by $3 billion. This was a blow to the Great Society and, given that spending on Vietnam put a significant strain on the economy, the criticism levied at him by leading Democrats that the war was now affecting domestic programmes certainly rang true. Evidence that the administration was disorganised and reactive in terms of press and public opinion management can be found in the memorandum that Moyers sent to Johnson on 30 September; the president's press secretary stated that there was no true organisation on the part of the administration in terms of military affairs. "We have no one high official of the government," he chided, "who spends full time on the war."[72] The lack of a stiff hierarchy in military affairs is significant to note. It shows a lack of forward planning on behalf of the administration, in that none of Johnson's aides were assigned to work specifically on the war and the fact that staff members were assigned to several projects at once meant a lack of focus, which in turn led to reactive strategies not only in terms of public affairs, but in many aspects of government – it is difficult to be pro-active when administration staff are working on multiple things at once. Jack Valenti put this down to Johnson's obsessive need for information, and noted that by 9am on any given morning the president's special assistants had instructions on any special projects they were working on.[73] Valenti's argument shows that the president lacked focus on many issues, often demanding a lot from his employees. Moyers noted that the administration was fighting a "part time war," something that was also true of Johnson's battles with the press. While Valenti noted that the President often used his lunch hour to try to cultivate favourable relationships with Washington reporters, and Johnson evidently held an obsession with knowing what reporters were writing about

[71] "The Economy: Action at Last," *TIME Magazine*, 16 September 1966, p. 33.
[72] Memorandum from the President's Press Secretary (Moyers) to President Johnson, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV Vietnam 1966, document 250, 30 September, pp. 677-678.
[73] J Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 127.

him, he simply reacted to the information he gathered, rather than use it to build a more sensible approach to the media.[74]

In a Gallup Poll published on 30 September, less than 50% of the polled audience felt that Johnson made the correct decision in sending troops into Vietnam; while 16% showed no opinion; this was a much more significant shortfall in the approval numbers than previous polls and the consensus Johnson looked for – and received – in his early days was clearly no longer in effect.

With the mid-term elections weeks away, Johnson and his key Vietnam advisors flew to Manila for a conference on the war and the direction it was to take. The difficulty faced by Johnson was that there was no prognosis for a speedy end to the war, something which he could not disseminate publicly without backtracking on previous statements. The Joint Chiefs of Staffs agreed on 14 October that "we cannot predict with confidence that the war can be brought to an end in two years," and advised Secretary McNamara that for psychological reasons the administration should prepare openly for a "long term, sustained military effort."[75] The president and his press secretary, Moyers, were evidently not expecting much from the conference, Johnson noting in a meeting of the National Security Council on 15 October, the same day he signed a bill to create the United States Department of Transport, that, "The conference will probably accomplish little," and Moyers that, "We should play down any expectation that a hard peace proposal will come out of the conference."[76]

Clearly the need to play down the idea of a long-running ground war was necessary, with less than a month to go before the vitally important mid-term elections, but once again Johnson and Moyers' statements are indicative of an attempt to ensure that information passed to the media and therefore to the public was not completely true, and yet again shows a short term strategy geared

[74] Ibid., pp. 130-31.
[75] Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 269, 14 October 1966, p. 739.
[76] B Smith, Summary Notes of the 565th Meeting of the National Security Council, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 272, 15 October 1966, p. 753.

towards the election cycle of the United States which could not be sustained for long afterwards given the need for increased troop numbers. The president once more opened himself up to accusations of a credibility gap through an inability to commit to a long-term press strategy. He yet again betrayed his distrust of the press in a meeting with South Vietnamese Premier Ky on 23 October, noting in his parting words; "Don't let the newspapermen divide us."[77] The conference itself was organised over two days; 24 and 25 October. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John T McNaughton felt the conference went well, noting "I think we got what we wanted,"[78] while General Westmoreland noted his surprise at the provision in the final communiqué for the United States to withdraw troops within six months following the cessation of North Vietnamese hostility.[79]

International reaction to the conference was wholly negative; Soviet reaction was predictably hostile and French President Charles De Gaulle was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, "We find it totally detestable that a small country should be bombed by a very big one."[80] The same article doubted the public opinion boost Johnson was hoping for would materialise. It noted that the president had not been well received everywhere he went during the Manila conference and ensuing two week tour of Southeast Asia and Australia. The president's car was attacked with paint during his time in Australia in protest over Australian troops supporting the American war effort – this action did not pique the anger of the American public, unlike previous protests against President Eisenhower in Tokyo, Japan and Senator Richard Nixon [R-California] in Caracas, Venezuela.[81] The article further explained problematic results of opinion polls on Johnson's Vietnam actions by noting that "Almost all politicians and political analysts believe that most of the

[77] Notes of Meeting, Manila, *FRUS 194-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam 1966, doc. 280, 23 October 1966, p. 770.
[78] Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (McNaughton) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 284, 26 October 1966, p. 783.
[79] Telegram from the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Westmoreland), to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler), *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 286, 27 October 1966, p. 786.
[80] "The President's Journey," *New York Times*, 30 October 1966, p. 188.
[81] For newsreel footage from British media sources of anti-US and anti-Eisenhower protests in Tokyo during his visit in 1960, see http://www.britishpathe.com/video/anti-eisenhower-demonstrations-in-tokyo/query/Tokyo and footage of then Vice-President Nixon's car being attacked in 1958 by Venezuelans protesting US Cold War policy at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvigX1doz2U . Both sources accessed on 30 May 2017.

American people are neither hawks nor doves but – above all – want to see the war in Vietnam honourably ended as soon as possible."[82] Clearly the trip had not been the ratings booster that Johnson was looking for in the immediate run up to the November election, and his insistence that American troops could leave within six months of hostilities ceasing, pending North Vietnamese co-operation, was a smokescreen for the probability of a protracted ground war. By putting the onus on Ho Chi Minh to cease hostilities, Johnson was attempting to remove the blame from himself and his administration for the increasingly lengthy war.

When the mid-term elections eventually came round in November, the Democrats maintained their majority, meaning that Johnson still had the ability to push through legislation for the Great Society and anything else which demanded his attention. But as the *New York Times* pointed out in a front-page story the day after Election Day, Republican gains were strong and unexpected.[83] Forty-seven seats in the House were gained in more than thirty states and Tom Wicker's article summed up the atmosphere by noting that in particular the re-election of Senator John Tower [R-Texas] over Johnson associate John Connally was a blow to the prestige of the president, who backed Connally in the run up to the election.[84] The Democrats lost three seats in the Senate, in Oregon, Tennessee and Illinois, where the incumbent senator Paul Douglas lost to his Republican rival Charles Percy. This was a small loss, given that the Democrats still held a healthy majority, but it was significant. By December, the president's sliding popularity was clear. George Gallup's syndicated poll showed the president's approval rating at 48%, with 37% of polled voters outright disapproving of the way he was handling his job. Forty percent of those polled disapproved of the way Vietnam was being handled, while a massive 44% regarded the Great Society programme unfavourably, compared with just 32% who were happy with the domestic policies.[85] Louis Harris'

[82] "The President's Journey – Meanwhile, Back in the States," *New York Times*, 30 October 1966, p. 188.
[83] Notably, this election saw the entry of future President Ronald Reagan into Republican politics, securing the governorship of California.
[84] T Wicker, "Republicans Stronger Than Was Expected In Off Year Vote," *New York Times*, 9 November 1966, p. 1, 25.
[85] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2038.

summary was even harsher – a press release on 30 November by the Harris through the Washington Post Company contradicted Gallup's claims that the Asian trip boosted his popularity from October's record lows – the Harris poll concluded that 43% of people approved of the way Johnson was handling the Presidency, with only 41% approving of his civil war programs and 35% agreeing with his economic statements.[86] This slump in approval over domestic issues is likely to have been because of the effects of inflation on the American economy over the course of the previous year; as previously mentioned, the President had been forced to announce he would cut spending by $3 billion in order to curb out-of-control inflation and the Great Society programme was seen as a big spending government program that significantly contributed to this emerging crisis. What this poll also shows is that, contrary to the administration's belief and the belief of some contemporary authors about Johnson, public confidence in the Great Society was not necessarily negatively impacted by Vietnam in 1966; while the president held a slim overall lead in his Vietnam job rating at 44% approval versus 40% disapproval, his domestic policy rating was already beginning to look lopsided. Sloan believes that while Johnson cannot be absolved of blame for the failure to make the necessary changes to taxation in 1965 and 1966, divisions between his economic advisors on the best course of action and their failure to push the issue with him can partially mitigate his hesitation.[87] Nevertheless, this is a clear failure by Johnson to be proactive in his domestic policy making, and the reaction to this was, once again, criticism and the undermining of his credibility as a leader.

With all this firmly in mind, the Johnson administration began to plan for 1967 in the closing weeks of the year. Aides scrambled to begin the process of writing the following year's State of the Union Address and an extensive memorandum of the goals of 1967 was bookended by a final target of mounting, "a major information campaign to inform both the US electorate and world opinion of

[86] United Press International, "Confidence in Johnson at Low Point," *Daily Herald* (Provo, UT), 6 December 1966, p. 4.
[87] J W Sloan, "President Johnson, The Council of Economic Advisers, and the Failure to Raise Taxes in 1966 and 1967," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Winter 1985), pp. 97-8.

the realities in Vietnam, finding ways to measure progress."[88] Evidently the administration was aware of slipping poll scores and the public opinion issues caused by the credibility gap, and quickly needed to take steps to resolve this situation. The short term nature of the administration's thinking with regards to media relations now led to an outright credibility gap and Johnson's statements in Manila, declaring a potential withdrawal within six months of hostilities ceasing, did not help matters when in fact the president was preparing to dig in for a lengthy conflict.

Matters were not helped in the final days of the year as *New York Times* assistant editor Harrison E. Salisbury began a series of damaging dispatches from Vietnam, accusing the United States of indiscriminately bombing civilian areas. His article on 27 December was entitled, "U.S. raids batter two towns," and noted that a textile factory in the civilian area of Namdinh was bombed "nineteen times." Salisbury contended that the assaults on Namdinh were "supposed to be an object lesson to show Hanoi what United States air power could accomplish if it were directed more powerfully to North Vietnam's capital."[89] In the same issue, Neil Sheehan – an influential writer on Vietnam in his own right – reported that Washington officials were made to acknowledge that American pilots "accidentally" struck civilian areas, but the Department of Defense, "issued a statement re-emphasizing that it was United States policy to attack only military targets in the North."[90] In his final news conference of 1966, on 31 December, the beleaguered president could only repeat the party line that had been reported by Sheehan the previous week. When asked in the same conference about General Westmoreland's assertion that the war would last several years, Johnson was evasive, stating, "I don't think anyone can say with any precision when the peace conference will come." The president was also asked outright whether he felt he was "doing things wrong." Johnson was resolute; "I know of no major decision that I have made that I would strike

[88] Draft National Security Memorandum, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, doc. 336, 10 December 1966, p. 923.
[89] H E Salisbury, "U.S. Raids Batter Two Towns," *New York Times*, 27 December 1966, pp. 1-3.
[90] N Sheehan, "Washington Concedes Bombs Hit Civilian Areas in North Vietnam," *New York Times*, 27 December 1966, p. 1, 3.

from the statute books tomorrow or would rewrite."[91] But the implication of the question was clear. Due to his administration's inability to create a pro-active and consistent strategy of disseminating information to the press and the public, Lyndon Johnson found himself with a critical image problem, and moving forward into 1967 it was now vitally important that he and his advisors find a way to resolve the credibility gap.

[91] For a transcript of the president's 31 December 1966 Press Conference see American Presidency Project at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28076.

Appendix A - *TIME Magazine* Cover, 7 January 1966 – Man of the Year; General William C. Westmoreland

TIME Magazine -- U.S. Edition -- January 7, 1966 Vol. 87 No. 1

This image has been redacted for electronic copies of this thesis due to rights issues, and can be accessed at the link provided above.

Chapter 5: 1967 – Pacification, Charm Offensives and Further Undermined Credibility

The end of 1966 had been difficult for Johnson and his administration. A Gallup poll published on 4 December 1966 put Johnson with a 48% approval rate, but, crucially, his Great Society was no longer popular or well regarded; 44% of poll respondents held an unfavourable opinion on domestic policy, compared to 32% who still believed that the Great Society was working. Views about Johnson's Vietnam policy were becoming more negative, with only 43% coming out in favour of his work in the region.[1] Louis Harris noted in his syndicated column on 9 January that confidence in Congress tumbled by 17 percentage points to 54% since the previous year, and that President Johnson carried a 43% positive rating in terms of the public's faith in him, lining up almost exactly with Gallup's poll ratings.[2] Positive public statements, such as a letter to *TIME Magazine* from a veteran in November 1966 bemoaning that, "A major portion of the Viet Nam news failure lies with editors at home,"[3] were becoming few and far between, although the president did take the top placement in Gallup's "Most admired man" poll for 1966, published on New Year's Day.[4] This press distrust was, however, the prevailing mood amongst members of the administration. A memorandum to the President from one of his special advisors on Vietnam, General Maxwell Taylor, sent on 1 January noted that he was "struck by the lack of public discussion of the very real problems involved in a settlement and hence the lack of preparation of public opinion for their appearance and for the conduct of our government in coping with them."[5]

Evidently, the fact that the public was not aware of what was going on behind the scenes was not lost on the president's special advisor. Taylor went on to advise, "We need to be sure of our own

[1] G. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 2038.
[2] L Harris, "Public Confidence in Congress Tumbles," *Albuquerque Journal* (Albuquerque, NM), 9 January 1967, p. 2.
[3] P G Colloton, "Letter to the Editor," *TIME Magazine*, 4 November 1966, p. 19.
[4] Ominously, these results saw Republican Senator Everett Dirksen (R-Illinois), former Senator Richard Nixon (R-California) and Republican Governors George Romney of Michigan and Ronald Reagan of California take up spots in the top ten, a potential warning to the president that the Republican Party was resurging in the eyes of the public. See Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2043.
[5] Paper Prepared by the President's Special Consultant (Taylor), 1 January 1967, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], 1964-1968, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, 1 January 1967, pp. 1-2.

government position on these and similar points and prepare our people in advance for the courses of action which we are likely to take—courses which many of our people will find unreasonably harsh."[6]

It is notable that Taylor requested that his position as special consultant be terminated on 3 January – he was denied his request, and stopped from being the latest in a series of notable departures from the administration over the previous year. This was to be the most important year yet in terms of the President's communication with the press and his management of public opinion. As Taylor intimated on New Year's Day, the war in Vietnam was at a crucial point. Importantly, the polls issued by George Gallup warned of the Great Society's waning popularity. It was absolutely vital that the President and his administration move quickly to address the credibility gap that became so prominent in 1966, and to try to bring the public back on side with both domestic and foreign policy. Robert Dallek notes that in the early stages of 1967 the president was keenly aware of his slipping poll ratings and popularity, but felt that a consistent stance on Vietnam would provide a boost to his popularity and quickly pull him out of the slump that he found himself in.[7]

The first chance for Johnson to advertise his combined policy in 1967 was, as always, his State of the Union address on 10 January. As with the previous year Joe Califano assumed the responsibility of collating information from various departments and task forces large and small to find talking points and opinions. A memorandum from 20 October 1966 saw Califano looking for input even on the subject of airport congestion[8] - showing how badly the administration wanted to find positive stories for Johnson to report to the public on 10 January.[9] For the writing of the speech, Bill Moyers set up a committee of several key aides, including Harry McPherson, Douglass Cater, John Roche, Hayes

[6] Ibid., p. 2.
[7] R Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson: Portrait of a President* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 273.
[8] A memorandum from Califano mentioned that the request was comparable to that of the previous year. See Memorandum from Califano to the President, 7 November 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 267, Lyndon B Johnson Library, Austin, Texas [LBJ Library].
[9] Ibid.

Redmon, Robert Hardesty, Will Sparks and Ben Wattenberg.[10] This core group would meet over the next month to come up with points for the January speech and would address the key public opinion issues that the administration would have to overcome. A memorandum from Redmon to Moyers on 2 December relayed several preliminary thoughts, which are important to note, including Walt Rostow's belief that the administration was in a "period of transition both at home and abroad."[11] He argued that the theme of the speech should be seeking new partnerships, and advocated a balanced approach to domestic and international affairs. Moyers, for his part, was aware that Johnson now faced a raft of criticisms that would need to be overcome. He listed them as follows:

1. That he is a promoter.
2. That he oversells his programs (more rhetoric than action?)
3. That he is too program oriented
4. That he lacks charisma and the qualities of leadership
5. The feeling that our society is spinning out of control and that the President cannot deal with the situation.[12]

This was a damning critique from a man who was one of the President's closest allies and dealt with public affairs for Johnson for some time. As press secretary, Moyers was keenly aware of the growing credibility gap and the plummeting approval ratings that the administration was suffering. Several of these criticisms plagued the President since the earliest days of the administration, particularly his reputation as a self-promoter and consummate politician who lacked charisma, particularly compared to John Kennedy. In this document, Moyers even went as far as to say that the President could be beaten if an election were held at that time, calling the 1967 State of

[10] The list was sent in a memorandum from speechwriter Robert Kintner to Charles Maguire asking him to speak to other key presidential staff: Memorandum from Kintner to Maguire, 8 December 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 225, LBJ Library.
[11] Memorandum from Hayes Redmon to Bill Moyers "RE: State of the Union Message," 2 December 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 225, LBJ Library, p. 1.
[12] Ibid., p. 2.

the Union, "the beginning of the '68 campaign."[13] Clearly the administration were aware of the public image problems that were beginning to plague Johnson even if the President was not – Moyers's critique of Johnson's popularity was particularly damning when taking into account his position in the centre of White House public relations. That he would leave his position within one month of the State of the Union is certainly significant – Moyers' relationship with the President was deteriorating. Robert Kintner for his part agreed, mentioning that there was a growing criticism of the President's inability to effectively manage his programs effectively. Harry McPherson brought up the spectre of the credibility gap once again, noting that it was now "drastic."[14] Califano, in charge of research into the speech, noted that the American people would be "stunned by the size of the budget," and that "we run the risk of creating a still higher level of unfulfilled expectations."[15]

Clearly, those around the President now worried about the image that was being put across to the people; they knew that something was needed to ensure that the President did not overextend himself and lend more credence to the damaging reports that became more prevalent in 1966. The lack of foresight that was shown in the previous years of the administration was now at a critical point, and it was vital that Johnson and his team were more focused on public image and restoring the president's credibility. Moyers was aware of the need for organization, sending memorandums to the President at his ranch on 19 and 23 December regarding a first draft of the speech; he noted that the draft was ready several weeks earlier than the previous year.[16] This is another indication that the writing team, particularly Moyers, had the feeling that this speech was of vital importance. Another member of the State of the Union task force, Will Sparks, sent remarks to Moyers as early as 5 December in which he stated that communication problems were down partially to the fact that, "Much of the country is still learning to understand his personal style and

[13] Ibid., p. 3.
[14] Ibid., p. 4.
[15] Ibid., p. 5.
[16] Confidential Memorandum from Bill Moyers to the President, 19 December 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 227, LBJ Library.

rhetoric."[17] If Moyers' comments were an example of members of the administration facing up to the issues that led Johnson to the brink of unpopularity and incredibility, Sparks' views were the antithesis. This is a strong example of the administration burying its collective head in the sand; by externalising the issue of understanding to the general public, Johnson became the victim of ignorance, rather than a politician who could not understand his electorate and was suffering accordingly. This was restrictive to any idea of a pro-active media strategy; the likes of Sparks were taking a defensive, reactive approach to external criticism and this attitude could only lead to a defensive, reactive media strategy.

For his part, Johnson retired to his ranch at this time while his team worked on the speech; Moyers noted that if the President were to stay in Texas over Christmas, he would need to join Johnson there to work on the speech further.[18] It is important to note that the President was not in Washington at the time of the early speechwriting process in favour of his Texan ranch. The question of how seriously the President took this speech, which came at a vital point for his public image, must therefore be asked. Was this another case of Johnson's inability to determine the tide of public opinion and work with his team to come up with a solution, or did he simply trust the men he surrounded himself with to come up with a draft that would satisfy what he believed to be important? In an interview, Johnson's speechwriter Harry Middleton noted that, "If we worked for him, we knew pretty well what he wanted to say, so it was not necessary for him to get so deeply involved that he wanted to spell it out to us."[19] Middleton was of the opinion that a writer would not last very long if he was not in tune with what Johnson wanted to say.[20] The majority of Johnson's staff members took this view, with many absolutely believing in the goals of the administration during their time in office, although importantly some staff, such as George Ball and the recently

[17] Memorandum from Will Sparks to Bill Moyers, 5 December 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 227, LBJ Library.
[18] Confidential Memorandum from Bill Moyers to the President, 23 December 1966, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 227, LBJ Library.
[19] Harry Middleton, interview with the author, 2 October 2014.
[20] Ibid.

departed McGeorge Bundy simply kept dissent private and away from the listening press. Bundy's biographer Gordon M. Goldstein noted, "Bundy could not cloak the antipathy he felt for Johnson's methods," but concluded, "he held a reverence for the presidency."[21] Evidently, despite this, Johnson did not feel that he had to keep a tight leash on his writing staff during the process of writing what would become one of his most important engagements with the American public during his time in office. Further to this, it does seem that Johnson was well aware of the importance of his image moving forward into 1967 – his wife Lady Bird noted that the Christmas cheer seemed further away than ever during the festive period of 1966 as he brooded over what courses of action must be taken over the coming months, and discussed the ugly stories that were presented by the news over the departure of Bill Moyers from the administration in December.[22]

Planning for the televised nature of the address was required now more than ever; the White House knew that the three networks would run reaction shows following the airing of the address. Cabinet secretary Robert Kintner, a former president of both the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), sent a memorandum to Johnson the day before the speech advising of potential reactions to the timing of the speech. He also strongly recommended that the Democratic Congressional Leadership be readily available for comment on any televised reaction show; Kintner recommended Speaker of the House John McCormack (D-Massachusetts) be available specifically.[23] He also warned that the Republican leadership would be preparing an immediate rebuttal of the President's address.[24] The administration knew they would need to immediately and strongly defend the address from Republican attacks, and as someone who was heavily involved in television Kintner was keenly aware of the need to use any television time to

[21] G M Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), p. 219.
[22] Lady Bird Johnson (C T Johnson), *A White House Diary* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 460. She noted in her entry for 5 January 1967 (p. 469), "A miasma of trouble hangs over everything."
[23] McCormack was staunchly anti-communist and, like Johnson, had been a New Deal politician during the Roosevelt years. He was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1928 and, as Speaker, would have made a compelling ally for the Johnson administration in any televised debate.
[24] Memorandum from R E Kintner to the President, 10.30am, 9 January 1967, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 227, LBJ Library.

the administration's advantage. That this was still being discussed less than forty-eight hours before the speech itself is indicative of the lack of foresight of the administration when it came to television and media broadcasting. It was vital for the strategy of how to react to the inevitable Republican challenge to Johnson's speech to be prepared ahead of time; the very fact that Kintner was still in touch with the President on how to deal with this matter the day before the speech suggests that the administration once again lacked the foresight to develop a pro-active approach to media management, despite the clear concerns of individuals such as Moyers in the preceding weeks.

The speech itself had a strong message. Johnson described a "Testing time," for the American people. He asked whether the United States possessed the "staying power," to keep fighting in Vietnam. Johnson intended to make the argument that while the objectives in Vietnam seemed ambiguous, it was important to continue the fight.[25] It was important for the President to make a strong statement about Vietnam while also giving the people a message about the now faltering Great Society programme. As late as 9 January speechwriter Harry McPherson commented to Bill Moyers in a memo that "The list of domestic problems is awfully long now. I fear it may strike people as an act of showmanship."[26] The domestic problems that he mentioned have been summarized by biographers and historians of the time such as Johnson biographer Robert Dallek, who notes that amongst other things, summer rioting was almost an annual occurrence under Johnson and crime increased at six times the normal rate under the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies.[27] These facts were not lost on the administration, much less on Johnson himself.

The expected negative reaction to the speech was immediate. The *Chicago Tribune*'s headline on 11 January read, "Lyndon Asks 6% War Tax: Puts Budget at Record 135 Billions,"[28] while the lead story began with criticisms from the Republican Party. House minority leader Gerald Ford

[25] A full copy of Johnson's State of the Union speech is available at the LBJ Library website, accessed at http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/670110.asp. The speech can be watched on YouTube, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZupzpaJeF8.
[26] Memorandum from Harry McPherson to Bill Moyers, 9 January 1967, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box no. 225, LBJ Library.
[27] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 278.
[28] "Lyndon Asks 6% War Tax; Puts Budget at Record $135 Billions," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 January 1967, p. 1.

called the President's projected programs, "A fiscal mess," and Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen, "expressed reservations about Johnson's surtax proposal at a press conference."[29] The *New York Times* article by Max Frankel was kinder to the President, but still reported that Johnson, "Acknowledged the criticisms of Great Society programs by governors and mayors," and discussed, "failure as well as success."[30] It is notable that several major newspapers ran with headlines advertising the President's request to increase taxes; one of the most obvious effects of the State of the Union on the general public would be the requested tax increase and no discussion appears to have been had over how to mitigate this with the general public; another example of the short sighted nature of Johnson's public relations tactics. Turner does note, however, that the administration found favourable reports in the media; Gerald Grant of the *Washington Post* was satisfied by the emphasis given to domestic programs, while Mike McManus of *TIME Magazine* was "extremely enthusiastic."[31] James Reston's editorial the following Sunday discussed Johnson's credentials as a reformer, and Reston believed that he was "not trying to follow but to transform the New Deal."[32] Reston concluded positively that Johnson was still an innovator – this constituted solid praise for the President's speech and while he was still polarising critics, the content of the speech was sound; a pro-active approach towards reform and an aggressive plan for the budget impressed critics such as Reston.

As has been discussed however, the nature of the speech and the changing and chaotic landscape of the Johnsonian administration were causing issues in gaining any traction with a solid and pro-active press strategy. Notably, the President was finding that his administration was experiencing a period of particularly high turnover. The departure of Press Secretary Bill Moyers, around the time of the State of the Union address was a large blow for the President in terms of his image, especially with high profile figures such as Maxwell Taylor clearly looking for a way out of the

[29] K Sims, "Higher Social Security Benefits Urged in State of Union Talk," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 January 1967, p. 1.
[30] M Frankel, "Johnson Asks a 6% Surcharge on Taxes for Vietnam War and Poverty Programs," *New York Times*, 11 January 1967, p. 17.
[31] K J Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 171.
[32] J Reston, "Washington: Johnson and the Age of Reform," *New York Times*, 15 January 1967, p. 235.

administration. A *TIME magazine* article from just after Taylor's appointment noted the skills he brought to the table, but he left under a cloud, a rift having developed between him and Johnson over the President's portrayal in the media. Dallek notes that some aides to Johnson felt Moyers did not do enough to stop the credibility gap from growing; his predecessor George Reedy put it strongest when he noted that, "It was no accident that the President's popularity started to fall very abruptly as soon as Bill took over,"[33] This is another indication of the siege mentality of the administration in its latter years; a fallen ally of Johnson's was immediately turned on and blamed for many of the problems that the president found himself with in early 1967. Dallek rightly notes however, that Moyers was not the ultimate cause of the credibility gap that opened up over the course of Johnson's time in office; the President's own tendency to favour secrecy over an open public discourse undoubtedly "stood at the center," of the widening gap between private goings on and public statements, as Dallek put it. This mystery led to the defensive and reactive stance that the administration took on many issues discussed in the press. At any rate, Moyers was not the only recent casualty in Johnson's close backroom staff. Jack Valenti, the speechwriter and strong pro-Johnson voice who was ridiculed by the Press in 1964 for noting in a speech to the advertising association of America that he "slept more soundly at night knowing that Lyndon B Johnson is my President," accepted the role of head of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in May 1966. He noted that he was, "disconnecting from the most substantive job," he would ever have.[34] On top of this, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy left to become President of the Ford Foundation in 1966, and the administrative casualties were now piling up; a lack of consistency in the advisory roles could only hinder the President's attempts to devise a clear and consistent strategy for any of his most pressing issues, let alone something to handle the press. As he brought in the third Press Secretary of his tenure – George Christian – the President had to deal with sliding popularity ratings, re-appointing important staff roles and dealing with figures such as Douglass

[33] Reedy, quoted in Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 228.
[34] J Valenti, *This Time, This Place: My Life in War, the White House and Hollywood* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), p. 278.

Cater, who Turner notes was upset with his public image of being Johnson's "hatchet man."[35] Christian served as press secretary for Johnson's Texas ally and Governor of the State John Connally, and possessed a reputation for honesty and integrity, according to George Reedy – he earned the sarcastic nickname, "Ol' Blabbermouth," from the White House Press Corps for his low-profile nature and tendency to double check facts before releasing them, but Turner notes that he "also gained the respect and confidence of the correspondents, several of whom praised him as Johnson's best press secretary."[36] In terms of a press strategy for the second half of his first term in office then, Christian's appointment was a strong one. Taking advantage of his low key reputation and knowledge of the role of press secretary at a state level, appointing Christian would prove to be a shrewd manoeuvre for Johnson going forward – respected by the press more than Moyers, Christian gave an air of authority to press conferences that was not previously present. While this could – and should – be called a reactive move, occurring only following the departure of another key member of staff, it was certainly a pro-active decision in terms of future public affairs and the relationships between press and public. However, the changing nature of the President's backroom staff made it exceptionally difficult to create a coherent and pro-active media strategy; from Pierre Salinger through George Reedy and Bill Moyers through to George Christian, Johnson used four different press secretaries, each with wildly different views and methods on how to work with the White House Press Corps and the wider media. Johnson could not hope to focus on a singular strategy with such behind the scenes turmoil, and this was undoubtedly an important factor in the administration's inability to properly focus on the press and public relations.

By the turn of 1967 it was clear that war matters had overtaken domestic politics in Johnson's mind; Admiral Thomas Moorer, chief of Naval operations, noted that by the turn of the year, Johnson complained that Vietnam was the only subject people wanted to talk to him about, but that whenever he was alone with the President, Johnson would inevitably turn the conversation

[35] On Cater's displeasure, see Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 175.
[36] Ibid. Reedy's opinions on his two predecessors are noted alongside the White House correspondents' opinions on Christian.

back to the war.[37] As 1967 began, the administration continued to find itself caught in the middle of hawks and doves in both the political and public arenas. In terms of public opinion and credibility, the Marigold affair of February was the next problem that the administration faced. In November 1966, the American government attempted, through intermediaries in communist Poland, to bring North Vietnam to the table and instigate talks, but the insistence of the administration on continuing bombing led to Hanoi pulling out of any proposed discussion; the Polish intermediaries were not shy in their private recriminations of the Johnson administration's actions in December; Polish Ambassador Michalowski described the bombing as, "A stupid and irresponsible act."[38] A memorandum from Dean Rusk to Johnson on 3 January confirmed that, "Hanoi believed our bombing, particularly of 13-14 December, showed clearly that we were not in good faith in seeking talks."[39] The Marigold situation was sufficiently important to the government that it affected public statements; in a top secret meeting with the leaders of the senate; minority leader Everett Dirksen (R-Illinois) and majority leader Mike Mansfield (D-Montana), Johnson noted that the "fragile hope" of negotiations, "could be destroyed by two things; first, by a loss of secrecy; second, by public statements or actions which were too soft or too hard."[40] The Polish were so incensed by the Johnson administration's actions during Marigold to hamper the possibility of talks with the North Vietnamese that they began to discuss the matter with sympathetic governments in Canada and France, and with the head of the United Nations, U Thant. With such a large amount of chatter going through diplomatic channels, it was inevitable that a leak would eventually appear in the press; a "short, sketchy" story by Robert H. Estabrook in the *Washington Post* on 2 February described the Polish frustration over Hanoi's attitude following the bombings, but clearly showed his source's view

[37] Moorer, quoted in Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 271.
[38] Michalowski, quoted in J. G. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 529.
[39] Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, 3 January 1967, *FRUS, Vietnam 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 4, January 3 1967, p. 11.
[40] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V Vietnam 1967, doc. 19, 18 January 1967, p. 41. Mansfield opposed the Vietnam War for much of his time in office, but favoured Johnson's domestic policies. Dirksen, on the other hand, was a staunch supporter of the war and appeared on many political television shows as a Republican representative.

that, "The Americans bungled it."[41] This was a potential disaster for Johnson; after the bluster of his State of the Union speech and repeated insistence that he wanted peace, the idea that a Presidential decision to bomb Hanoi decisively ended a real chance at peace talks would be a killer blow to the administration. This was brought up by Arthur Goldberg on 2 February, as he noted that "Our public record… will need bolstering, for it appears the record is being rather badly clouded by [the] Polish version of how our mid-December bombings interfered with what they conceive to be a very promising chance of talks with Hanoi."[42]

Added to his sliding approval ratings – Gallup's poll of 14 February showed that a round 40% of people now outright disapproved of the way Johnson was handling the situation in Vietnam – and the situation became critical.[43] Following three months of deflection after the Goldberg article, the administration was given a boost when the *New York Times* picked up an article from the Associated Press and published it on the front page with the headline, "4-Month U.S. Bid Ignored by Hanoi," – termed as a "lengthy, sympathetic account" of the Marigold negotiations by *Associated Press* journalist John M. Hightower. Hightower pushed Secretary Rusk during off the record conversations for several months and the Secretary was an important contributor to much of Hightower's fact checking and writing process.[44] Hershberg notes that this led to something of a paradox in press coverage on the war from the two largest newspapers in the country – the traditionally conservative, hawkish *Washington Post* hinted at Washington's failure to take a chance to open negotiations, while the generally more dovish *New York Times* splashed across its front page an administration approved response which several journalists, including Estabrook, felt was a

[41] R H Estabrook, quoted in J.G. Hershberg, *Marigold*, p. 549.
[42] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, doc. 35, 4 February 1967, pp. 81-2.
[43] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2105.
[44] Rusk courted the journalist and invited him to submit drafts for the Secretary to "tidy up." The process is described in Hershberg, *Marigold*, pp. 589-90.

whitewash.[45] It is not clear whether or not Johnson himself signed off on the leak, but what this does show is twofold.

Firstly, it is an example of the administration – in particular Dean Rusk – formulating a response to what could have been a major issue and cultivating a relationship with members of the press – in this case John Hightower – to use to the advantage of the President. This is a strategy which was been sorely lacking in Johnson's own belligerent dealings with the press over the preceding years – his crass methods never truly moved beyond his time in the Senate and even by 1967 he was difficult to pin down, regularly scheduling last minute press conferences to wrong-foot journalists, but the people around him were becoming more adept at how they dealt with press intrusion. It was noted that Hightower, "ferretted out two thirds of the story himself," but the decision had been taken to leak the story and ensure that the administration gained some favourable press coverage.[46] That it was picked up so strongly by the *New York Times* was somewhat serendipitous.

Secondly, the episode shows the benefits that an organized press strategy can have; while the first damaging reports came out in February and it took a significant amount of time for the government to gain favourable coverage in the press following the printing of this story in May, it was important to ensure that the government span a consistent line on the Marigold affair, such was its potential to cause credibility problems. The end result was that the President's approval ratings saw a small increase over the early part of 1967, thanks in part to a solid and consistent line on Vietnam, exemplified by the Marigold press strategy.

Vietnam was, however, only one aspect of the beleaguered President's problems in the early months of 1967. The budget outlined during the State of the Union address shone a spotlight on the increasing inflation that the United States was experiencing, and domestic spending was in large part

[45] Ibid., p. 591.
[46] Ibid., p. 593.

down to the Great Society. For a country that experienced unrivalled economic growth since the Second World War ended, this was a difficult situation. The inflation issue caused a period of extended domestic pressure for Johnson and his administration. Dallek notes that it was not a business slowdown and growing unemployment that undermined Johnson's credibility as a promoter of prosperity, but an increase in the gross national product and in jobs – particularly during June and October – which caused inflation to begin to run away from the administration's control. Dallek further believes that, "Despite a campaign of public education," with the idea of promoting his stance on domestic budget cuts, "the President made little headway in convincing either reluctant house members or the mass of Americans that he was right."[47] In a news conference on 3 August, the President was asked several questions about the economy; he was short when asked what his reaction to Republican requests for him to create a new budget with no further taxation, responding that he had already given his reaction. He noted when asked that, "Most of the responsible business people," agreed with the idea of a tax increase, but also said that, "We will have a lot of speeches on nonessential expenditures."[48] These were vague responses that did not fully answer the question; in other words reactive replies with little substance or forethought behind them. The following day, John D. Morris writing for the *New York Times* noted that, "Congress scrutinized President Johnson's tax increase program with a mix of resignation, pain and hostility."[49] *TIME Magazine* noted on 11 August that the President's idea of the businessmen of the country agreeing to the tax increase was not necessarily correct, given that, "until a month ago the Administration was predicting that the surcharge would amount to no more than 6%."[50] Once more, Lyndon Johnson's propensity for keeping secrets from the American public – businessman and layman alike – was put under the microscope by a major publisher. Yet again, the inability to take a

[47] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, pp. 274-75.
[48] L B Johnson, "The President's News Conference on the Tax Message," 3 August 1967. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28373.
[49] J D Morris, "Johnson asks for 10% Surcharge on Personal and Business Taxes, 45,000 More Men to go to Vietnam," *New York Times*, 4 August 1967, p. 1.
[50] "The Nation: The Economy," *TIME Magazine*, 11 August 1966, p. 10.

coherent line on a subject and stick to it cost Johnson some credibility in the arena of public opinion. While it is true that Johnson was looking to take a more consistent line on public affairs in 1967, Dallek once again makes the point that Johnson privately felt he would have to "cut reform programs to the bone," but publicly, "Johnson's strategy was to pump as hard as ever for antipoverty and Great Society programs."[51] Admittedly, Johnson found himself in a difficult political spot; to announce sweeping cuts to his own reform programs of the previous three years would be to commit political suicide, and allow Republican naysayers such as Richard Nixon or New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller a massive victory to take forward into the 1968 elections. Johnson's own rhetoric backed him into a corner and now that domestic concerns were creeping into view, it was becoming more difficult than ever for the President to keep his Great Society dream afloat in the eyes of the public. Douglass Cater noted in an oral history interview in 1974 that by 1967, "he was really having to go to the mat on the surcharge business," indicating the difficulty that Johnson was having by this point in convincing Congress of his financial endeavours.[52] By August, Louis Harris announced the unpopularity of Johnson's measures by noting that, "The guaranteed annual wage and the 'negative income tax' – both arouse more opposition than support among the American public."[53] This difficulty and the unfavourable press coverage that followed it, caused by a mixture of circumstances and an inconsistent government line, undoubtedly hurt the President's credibility and public image during the middle months of 1967. While it is true that any President would have struggled to control the rising inflation inherent in the United States, Johnson's strategy towards releasing information – to keep his views on necessary cuts away from prying ears – certainly did not help his case.

Fiscal problems were not the only issues that Johnson had to deal with on the home front. Criticism was mounting from African Americans who felt that they were being marginalised by the

[51] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 275.
[52] Transcript, Douglass Cater Oral History Interview III, 26 May 1974, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, p. 12.
[53] L Harris, "Harris Survey: Salary Plan, Negative Tax Have Opposition," *Winona Daily News (*Winona, MN*)*, 7 August 1967, p. 7.

president in favour of a frivolous war thousands of miles away. On 4 April, Dr Martin Luther King Jr. publicly denounced the war and drew parallels between the struggle in Vietnam and the struggle for racial equality domestically. King noted that the war was responsible for the halting of important domestic programs, saying that he was "increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such."[54] King spoke for many in the black community; increasingly, African Americans felt that focus on the war was removing focus on their domestic issues, which were still very much ongoing – many of them began to round on the administration for not following through on what had been promised by the Great Society. One high profile example of this was the heavyweight boxer and sports personality Muhammad Ali, who refused to be drafted and tellingly responded to criticisms in a televised interview by noting, "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong. They ain't never called me nigger."[55] It was clear that racial tensions were still building in the United States by 1967; as previously noted Dallek has made the point that race riots were becoming more regular in the inner city areas and 1967 was to be no different; Tampa, Florida saw a riot on 11 June, and July would be some of the worst rioting in United States history to date. Newark, New Jersey saw riots on 11 and 12 July, while a battle in Milwaukee, Wisconsin was ended by police intervention on 30 July. If the Watts riots of 1964 were bad, the Newark riots were worse; 26 were killed, 1,500 were injured and much of inner city Newark was burned out by the end of the fighting.[56] An official memorandum sent by Joe Califano noted that, "This is going to be a very difficult situation when it comes out in a day or so," and worried about rewarding rioters for their actions in the official response to the fighting.[57] It is worth noting that Johnson has ticked "Yes," to Califano's suggestion of taking a "quiet look" at poverty and racial programs being enacted in New Jersey at the time, in order to be more informed about possible reactions. It is not clear if he approved Califano's second

[54] M L King, Jr, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break The Silence," Delivered 4 April 1967, Riverside Church, New York City, speech and transcript available at American Rhetoric, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm.
[55] For Ali's statement see Youtube, accessed 23 August 2017 at the web address; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vd9aIamXjQI.
[56] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 281.
[57] Memorandum from Joe Califano to the President, 15 July, 1967, "File HU2/st23-st32," White House Central Files HU2/ST30, box 26, LBJ Library.

suggestion of appointing Attorney General Ramsay Clarke as the official point of contact for the Newark riot – possibly preferring to control the situation himself in an attempt to appear more authoritative and as he termed it, presidential. By far the worst of the summer rioting occurred in Detroit, on 23 July. A *TIME Magazine* correspondent claimed that he felt in more danger covering Detroit than he did during his last assignment, in Vietnam.[58] Pictures filled the 4 August edition of *TIME*, as Johnson reluctantly called in federal troops to act alongside the National Guard and quell fierce fighting in the centre of Detroit. Detroit Mayor Jerome P Cavanagh was quoted by the *New York Times* as having taken, "strong exception," to the White House's hesitancy in issuing the order to send in Federal troops.[59] Michigan governor George Romney was quoted as saying that the rioting area "Looked like a city that had been bombed."[60] The criticism of Cavanagh was reported to the nation alongside Romney's summarization of the state of play in Detroit, which did nothing to enhance the President's reputation as the possibility that he delayed his reaction and indirectly helped to worsen the ugly scenes in Detroit. Cyrus Vance, who acted as Johnson's man on the ground in the city, would later refute this argument in an oral history interview; the President delayed for thirty minutes in order to prepare a statement to give to the country, but in the meantime advised Vance to, "go ahead and make all the necessary preparations so they could move as rapidly as possible."[61]

Vance's later rebuttal did nothing to help the President's credibility at the time. The *New York Times*, reporting on 24 July, noted one rioter's cry of "I was in Korea too. I'm 42 and I can't get a job."[62] This echoed Martin Luther King's criticisms of the war from April, and typified much of the complaint of African Americans; despite serving their country, it was still prohibitively difficult for

[58] "Letter from the Publisher," *TIME Magazine*, 4 August 1967, p. 11.
[59] G Roberts, "U.S. Troops Sent into Detroit, 19 Dead; Johnson Decries Riots; New Outbreak in East Harlem," *New York Times*, 24 July, p. 1.
[60] G Romney, quoted in "The Nation: Politics – After Detroit," *TIME magazine*, 4 August 1967, p. 18.
[61] Transcript, Cyrus R. Vance Oral History Interview I, 3 November 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, p. 27.
[62] Associated Press, "Detroit is Swept by Rioting and Fires, Romney Calls in Guard," *New York Times,* 24 July 1967, p. 1, 15.

them to integrate with American society. For his part, Johnson felt that African American riots were embarrassing and undermined what he saw as his commitment to African American rights; on 27 July he hastily announced the Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, headed by Otto Kerner, the governor of Illinois. In the announcement speech he vented some of his frustrations to the world: "There is no American right to loot stores, or to burn buildings, or to fire rifles from the rooftops. That is crime – and crime must be dealt with forcefully, and swiftly, and certainly under law."[63] Evidently Johnson was perturbed, something which became more evident as the situation continued to unfold. The *New York Times* reported on 28 July, the day after Johnson announced the Advisory Commission's inception that urban problems "need to be attacked with at least the same free-spending determination that the Administration and Congress so far have reserved for the war in Vietnam."[64] The following day, an editorial begged the President not to "use the commission as an excuse for delay in the exertion of forceful Presidential leadership to promote programs that could and should be initiated or enlarged immediately."[65] Once again, the credibility of the President was undermined; the riots from poor black Americans directly weakened both the war on poverty and the civil rights legislation that Johnson worked so hard in the early months of his Presidency to pass, and he was well aware of it. Johnson's strategy toward the press was stretched by the crisis in the cities during the summer of 1967, but it was not entirely the fault of the administration; confused reports coming in from areas like Newark and Detroit made decision making extremely difficult, but the need for consensus crippled the President, who seemed unable to make a decisive movement which would prove his strength in a crisis, preferring instead to take, as Califano put it, a "quiet look" at programs to see what could be done in private. This accurately illustrates the failure of Johnsonian press strategy, and one of the reasons that the credibility gap became so pronounced over the

[63] L B Johnson, "The President's Address to the Nation on Civil Disorders," 27 July 1967. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28368.
[64] "Sickness of the Cities," *New York Times*, 28 July 1967, p. 23.
[65] "Crisis in the Cities," *New York Times*, 29 July 1967, p. 18.

preceding eighteen months. With all this ongoing, the Presidential focus remained on Vietnam; by mid-1967, Johnson found his public image in real trouble.

The President's strategy of maintaining a consistent line on Vietnam had not worked, and by the end of summer, domestic concerns further eroded Johnson's standing with the public. It is true that circumstances did not assist Johnson in his attempts at consistency in 1967; race riots undermined his commitment to civil rights and inflation threatened his commitment to the Great Society as a whole; the calls for a new budget backed the administration into a corner, and once again it became clear that a siege mentality was taking hold. The President was at a low ebb, and his opinion polls reflected this. On 29 July, Gallup's poll showed that only 33% approved of the President's current stance on Vietnam.[66] On 13 August, Johnson's job rating as measured by Gallup dropped to 39% - this was a record low, and when compared to his poll ratings of 70% and more during late 1963 and early 1964 his reputation plummeted in the eyes of those surveyed. In August, *Esquire* published a story that laid bare the darkest aspects of the President's character, taking advantage of apparent leaks within the administration to paint a picture of the President as having dual personalities; the public "Presidential" Johnson and the Machiavellian private man who delighted in cruelty and browbeat officials into quitting their posts. The article accused Johnson of "overdrawing from his credibility account,"[67] and noted that, "White House reporters groan inwardly when they see one of Johnson's humility bits coming, for they have glimpsed the hard man beneath the mush."[68] The *Esquire* article took its lead from the previous discussions on Johnson's actions throughout 1967; crises in his handling of both domestic affairs and Vietnam policy showed his secretive nature in a very public light and further widened the credibility gap; the failure of the administration to find a strategy to combat this in the press only worsened matters.

[66] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2074.
[67] J Deakin, "The Dark Side of L.B.J.," *Esquire Magazine*, August 1967, p. 136.
[68] Ibid., p. 45.

It was clear then that the President needed to do something about his public image quickly, and it was decided that he would televise an address to the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio on 29 September. Kathleen Turner, who has written extensively on the speechwriting process and Johnson's difficulty with the media, notes that the development of this speech "became the testing ground within the White House over public handling of the topic of Vietnam."[69] In fact it was more than that. It was Lyndon Johnson's chance to show that he was committed to a strong, coherent line on the war which held no secrets from the public and would set the administration up to continue a consistent, open and pro-active approach to public relations that would stand not only Johnson, but the Democratic Party, in good stead moving into an election year.

As with Johnson's other major addresses, several writers worked on different drafts of the speech; speechwriter Harry McPherson noted that a, "Rostow-Katzenbach-Nitze-Busby" version of his draft omitted a key point – that no simple phrase could alleviate the doubt of the American people over Vietnam.[70] McPherson argued that this, "is skirting the most obvious political truth about the situation." He further argued that the new draft, with a more standardised explanation of the war, "has all been heard so many times before."[71] McPherson was scathing about the second draft. Johnson appears to have taken McPherson's advice; he noted in his address that, "There are many sincere and patriotic Americans who harbor doubts about sustaining the commitment that three Presidents and half a million of our young men have made."[72] Positive responses to the speech were immediately sent to the President when they arrived – annotation on the document indicates that Johnson saw a review from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle

[69] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 194.
[70] The writers identified are National Security Assistant Walt W Rostow, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Nitze and speechwriter and aide Horace Busby.
[71] Memorandum from Harry McPherson to the President, 28 September 1967, "Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 252, LBJ Library
[72] L B Johnson, "Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas," 29 September, 1967. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28460.

Wheeler who telephoned the White House to call the speech, "magnificent."[73] Morton Mintz, writing for the *Washington Post*, noted the President's "cautionary note against the dangers of debate and dissent" at home.[74] Pleasingly for Johnson, the article made a point of noting that the President was stopped six times during the speech for applause. The journalist Lyle Denniston noted that prior to San Antonio, "It has never been completely clear," what Johnson was looking for from the North Vietnamese to begin peace talks.[75] Setting down a marker for a pro-active and energetic stance towards media relations going forward was paramount by this point in Johnson's tenure, and by and large the speech succeeded in impressing critics, if not converting them to Johnson's line of thinking. Not everyone was happy with the San Antonio address however; Max Frankel writing for the *New York Times* noted that Johnson, "invariably stimulates a discussion that raises as many questions as he tried to answer," with the speech. Frankel did however note that the White House realised, "the lines of communication on the home front are now the most important ones of the war."[76] This was a vital understanding for Johnson, who fought with the press for years and struggled to reconcile their treatment of him with his thoughts on how the President should be treated – as his press secretary George Christian remembered. The San Antonio address kicked off a real effort by the administration to court public opinion, particularly on the subject of Vietnam, and in the context of improving the beleaguered President's public image was an important event.

The need for pro-active media and public strategies was strong; despite a good showing in San Antonio the polls published by Gallup were not especially friendly for Johnson, and anti-war sentiment continued to bubble in the country. Unrest came to a head in October when 100,000 protestors marched on the capitol on 21 October. Posters advertised the planned schedule and the

[73] Note to the President, 30 September 1967, "Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative conference, San Antonio, Texas," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 252, LBJ Library.
[74] M Mintz, "LBJ Insists Hanoi Bars Peace; Defends Policy on Vietnam," *Washington Post*, 30 September 1967, clipping in "Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 252, LBJ Library.
[75] L Denniston, "LBJ Hints at Cut In Price For Ending Bombing of North," *Washington Star*, 30 September 1967, clipping in "Address on Vietnam Before the National Legislative Conference, San Antonio, Texas," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 252, LBJ Library.
[76] M Frankel, "Johnson's Credibility," *New York Times*, 2 October 1967, p. 2.

White House planned for the potential violence that such a large protest on such a controversial subject could bring.[77] The protest moved on towards the Pentagon, where hundreds of protestors were arrested.[78] For his part, Johnson strongly re-stated his commitment to Vietnam in the press.[79] An editorial in the *New York Times* lambasted the protestors; "How many of them," it asked, "really dislike Johnson enough to pull the voting booth lever for a Republican in 1968?"[80] This represented a win for Johnson despite growing resentment towards the war in Vietnam, but the President knew that more must be done, noting in a meeting on 23 October that, "We've almost lost the war in the last two months in the court of public opinion. These demonstrators and others are trying to show that we need somebody else to take over this country." Johnson concluded that, "We've got to do something about public opinion."[81] The large-scale demonstration of October was the culmination of Johnson's Vietnam strategy throughout 1967; the President tried to take a consistent stance on Vietnam, as noted by Dallek, but this failed.

Following the demonstration, polls related to Vietnam remained as dreary as his August ratings, with 46% of respondents to the 25 October poll thought that the United States had made a mistake in entering Vietnam compared with 44% who believed that America was right. 49% of respondents believed that Nixon would beat Johnson if an immediate election were called on 22 October, and only 21% thought that a Democratic President was in a better position to end the war than a Republican on 8 October.[82] Despite this, however, poll results were improving on the whole, thanks in no small part to a more cohesive and prominent press strategy, as outlined in the planning for the President's San Antonio speech, as well as a negative reaction to the protests of late October. On 2 November, Walt Rostow sent a memorandum to Johnson asking him to consider, "how can we increase public understanding and support," for the administration's course in Vietnam, prior to his

[77] See Appendix B.
[78] See Appendix C.
[79] M Frankel, "Johnson Affirms Vietnam Policies Despite Protest," *New York Times*, 24 October 1967, p. 1.
[80] R Baker, "Observer: Dove Antics," *New York Times*, 24 October 1967, p. 45.
[81] Notes of Meeting, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vietnam, vol. V, 1967, doc. 363, 23 October 1967, p. 875.
[82] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, pp. 2085-87.

meeting with several important advisors from both within the administration and out with. These "Wise Men" meetings of 1 and 2 November were attended by several important figures in the Johnson administration and policy makers from previous governments such as Harry Truman's Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and ambassadors Charles Bohlen and W. Averell Harriman. The meetings are important behind the scenes markers for how the administration intended to pursue a cohesive public opinion strategy for the last two months of 1967 and moving forward. Ostensibly planning meetings for the course of the Vietnam war, the first meeting on 1 November did not include Johnson; he was present for the second meeting the following day. It was noted by Secretary Rusk on 1 November that North Vietnamese focus was shifting towards the American politics, while retired General Omar Bradley and the lawyer and advisor Arthur Dean discussed presenting a case for Vietnam to the public that would unify the country.[83] This was brought up in the meeting with Johnson the following day; Dean Acheson and former advisor McGeorge Bundy noted to the President that public opinion was more concerned with casualty reports than news on the bombing program in Vietnam; Bundy in particular noted that, "what is eroding public support are the battles and death and dangers to the sons of mothers and fathers with no picture of a result in sight." Bundy has the view, similar to that of Johnson, that the newsmen of New York could not be swayed into support. This is yet another marker of the distrust of press activity by the administration; while Bundy was no longer technically a part of the Johnson team, he had nonetheless been involved in discussions throughout the early escalation of the war in 1965 and 1966. He echoed the view that the press was irrevocably against Johnson and his statement on the matters indicates the siege mentality of the administration when it came to press relations. Dean Rusk backed up this mentality with his note on public opinion polls; "one of the problems in polling of public opinion on the popularity of the war is the way the questions are phrased," he was noted as contributing. The implicit accusation is that pollsters like Louis Harris and George Gallup worded questions in such a way as to elicit a negative reaction from those polled; Rusk said that he was sure that the President

[83] Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 376, 2 November 1967, pp. 949-50.

would respond, "Hell no," should he be asked if he was happy about the war. The idea that pollsters were asking leading questions is a further symbol of the distrust of negative commentators by the administration. The meeting with advisors was to, as Johnson put it, see if the current course in Vietnam was correct and if not, how it could be modified, but members of the administration seemingly could not look inward enough to sense any problems, preferring to place some or all of the blame on external forces such as the press, or pollsters. Even Johnson kicked off the meeting by noting his concern over the lack of editorial support for US policies: "if a bomb accidentally kills two civilians in North Vietnam it makes banner headlines. However, they can log mortar shells into the Palace grounds in Saigon and there are no editorial complaints against it."[84]

Johnson and the administration were taking public relations very seriously. From the Wise Men meetings, the administration planned to move forward with more public engagements, having recognised the need to pro-actively defend their policies. It was of clear significance that the President engage the nation on the subject of Vietnam in the latter stages of the year, but how best to do this was hotly debated within the administration; a document sent to Johnson from McNamara on 1 November argued that continuing on the current course would not be enough to convince the public of movement towards success by the end of 1968. Writing the day before a large meeting between the President and his Vietnam advisory staff, McNamara requested that the President adopt a policy of "stabilization," and recommended a pause in the bombing of Vietnam to occur before the end of the calendar year.[85] General Maxwell Taylor notably suggested organizing a continuous nationwide campaign noting that, "Television is our best weapon as it is with the opposition."[86] Johnson-nominated Supreme Court Judge Abe Fortas believed that public opinion "is a fickle thing and a changeable thing," Clark Clifford warned that on Vietnam, "No matter what [public relations action] accomplishes, this will not be a popular war," and cited American

[84] Memorandum from the President's Assistant (Jones) to President Johnson, in *FRUS, 1964-1968,* vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 377, 2 November 1967, p. 955.
[85] Draft Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 375, 1 November 1967, p. 944.
[86] *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 377, p. 955.

involvement in other wars such as the World Wars and the Revolutionary Wars as wars which were not popular during their time. Fortas in particular would follow up his views with a strongly worded memorandum to Johnson on 5 November denouncing McNamara's opinions on public opinion. "We should not assume," he asserted, "that the American public are unwilling to sustain an indefinitely prolonged war." He argued that from the standpoint of public opinion Johnson should continue with his course and assume that the public were supportive until they "make it impossible for this administration to do what it considers to be right in the national interest," through Congress or the polls. He also noted, "Our duty is to do what we consider right – not what we consider the 'American people' want.[87]

Fortas's view has been explicitly stated here to underline the fact that Johnson had to deal with a mass of differing advice when contemplating his strategy toward the public at this stage in his Presidency; Fortas was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1965 by Johnson and was one of his close advisors outside of the government, but here he argued vehemently against McNamara's draft comments on Vietnam of 1 November. Where the secretary of defence was pessimistic about the President's chances of winning over the public and in turn being able to successfully continue the war, the Supreme Court justice argued that not only was it not a given that public support was truly waning, but that it did not truly matter. For a president who always thrived on consensus politics, this was a testing atmosphere for Johnson, and when taken alongside his distrust of press motives and coverage, made it difficult for him to make a decision that would be received well by everyone around him. Johnson's solution to this particular issue was simple; McNamara was nominated to become president of the World Bank on 21 November and left his post by the following April as the latest and, alongside Bill Moyers, one of the most high profile Johnson staffers to leave office. Stories circulated that McNamara was struggling under his workload and the pressure of his position, but his departure was not well received by the press; the White House's initial silence on

[87] Memorandum from the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court (Fortas) to President Johnson, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 387, 5 November 1967, p. 991.

the war betrays a return to their inconsistent press strategy and reactive stance; the *New York Times* pointed this out on 29 November, just after the announcement. The sub-headline noted that the White House was silent on why he had been moved on, and author Neil Sheehan speculated that a rift opened up between the president and McNamara with the latter unable to "voice essential doubts," over Vietnam.[88] James Reston, in the same edition, contended that, "everybody gets something, but not quite what he wanted; McNamara is on his way out, but not quite, and will still have his hand on the brake," of further escalation in Vietnam.[89] The McNamara dispute came during a concerted effort by Johnson to experiment with press relations and work to bring the press back on side, and represented a significant step back; confusion reigned over reporting and without official word from the White House as to why the decision was taken to nominate McNamara to the World Bank, speculation was bound to occur.

It was by now no longer enough for Johnson to send his staff to engage with television reporters. A co-ordinated public relations effort, "represented a deeper public commitment to a specific theory of victory," namely that the United States was not fighting an endless war, and while Vietnam was now a war of attrition, victory would be assured thanks to the superiority in numbers and hardware of the United States army.[90] To begin with, General Westmoreland was flown home from his station as leader of MACV in Vietnam to participate in interviews and public relations exercises; as he first stepped off the plane on American soil he remarked that he had never been more optimistic about the prospects for success.[91] Westmoreland would appear on the TV show "Meet The Press" to defend the administration's policy on Vietnam and showcase his own positive predictions about the way the war was going. Relying on Westmoreland's persona was important for this public relations push; the General was generally not inclined to exaggerate for political effect

[88] N Sheehan, "Shift of McNamara Raises Speculation of Rift on War," *New York Times*, 29 November 1967, p. 1.
[89] J Reston, "Washington: Why McNamara? And Why Now?" *New York Times*, 29 November 1967, p. 46.
[90] J Rovnor, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 75.
[91] W Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), p. 269.

and his optimistic tone when interacting with the press and the public caused them to take his predictions seriously. This worked well for the administration; Westmoreland lent an air of trustworthiness on the matter of Vietnam that Johnson lacked since the opening of the credibility gap almost two years prior. Gregory Daddis believes that Westmoreland's actions in 1967 – particularly speeches that he gave in April to the Associated Press's annual editors luncheon and a joint session of Congress that roused legislators to "enthusiastic cheers," won no converts to the pro-war view. Daddis cites Tom Wicker's view that Johnson was trading on Westmoreland's reputation. He also notes that the public relations campaigns of 1967 fell short in convincing the American people of the war's legitimacy and defining the parameters of the conflict to the public.[92] There is certainly some truth to Daddis' view – the simple fact was that after an extended period of time muddying the waters on Vietnam, the administration's attempts to set out a forthright and pro-active plan for managing public expectation seemed like too little, too late. Nevertheless, this was an important change in the attitude of the Johnson public relations strategy at a crucial time in the war. Alongside the general, US Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker was brought in to deal with some press relations. As a hawk on the war, Bunker succeeded Henry Cabot Lodge as ambassador in April, and Lodge himself suggested in the Wise Men's meeting of 2 November that Bunker be given a lot of publicity work when he returned to report later that month.[93] McGeorge Bundy noted in a memorandum to Johnson on 10 November that he felt, "we have tried too hard to convert public opinion by statistics and by spectacular visits," but, "public discontent with the war is now wide and deep," indicating that Bundy felt previous attempts by the administration to court public opinion while he served in the administration failed.[94]

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[92] G Daddis, "Johnson, Westmoreland and the "Selling" of Vietnam," *New York Times*, 9 May 2017, accessed on 10 August 2017at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/opinion/johnson-westmoreland-and-the-selling-of-vietnam.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FJohnson%2C%20Lyndon%20B.&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=7&pgtype=collection On Daddis's research into William Westmoreland as a strategist, see Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[93] *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 377.

[94] Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, *FRUS 1964 – 1968*, vol. V, Vietnam 1967, doc. 393, 10 November 1967, pp 1010-1012.

An early November meeting between the President, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Earle Wheeler, CIA Director Richard Helms, Walt Rostow and George Christian was devoted entirely to discussing the potential merits of Rusk and McNamara appearing on a televised 19 December "year-end wrap-up," for CBS.[95] Christian reported that Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland would appear on the show "Meet the Press" the following Sunday, which was an important marker for the new focus on press relations; giving the two important airtime to push the positive view of Vietnam. Johnson underlined the new focus at the end of the meeting, noting, "We need to get a better story to the American people." Westmoreland and Bunker's "Meet the Press" interview went ahead on 19 November, and the pair gave a very positive spin on the situation in Vietnam. Bunker noted that the administrations was constantly looking for ways to open negotiations, while Westmoreland praised the confident attitude of the South Vietnamese people, as well as Americans involved in the war.[96] Reporting for the *New York Times* the following day, Peter Grose noted that Westmoreland and Bunker foresaw a reduction in the American role in the war if current progress continued.[97] It is worth noting however that the same edition of the newspaper contained statements from Governor George Romney – kicking off his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination – and the chairman of New York's Council against Poverty – the Reverend Carl H. McCall – denouncing the President's methods both domestically and in Vietnam.[98] James Reston further justified the decision to send Bunker and Westmoreland to "Meet the Press" in his column for the *New York Times*; the influential columnist wrote that, "They have been effective witnesses because they are serious, attractive and well informed men – as good as anything we have in the military and diplomatic services of the United States," summarising that they made persuasive

[95] Notes of Meeting, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam 1967, 15 November 1967, doc. 400, p. 1030.
[96] Meet the Press: America's Press Conference of the Air, 19 November 1967, transcript accessed on 6 June 2017 and available at http://www.salon.com/2007/09/13/westmoreland_petraeus/.
[97] P Grose, "War of Attrition Called Effective by Westmoreland: He and Bunker Foresee a Reduction in U.S. Role if Progress Continues," *New York Times*, 20 November 1967, p. 1.
[98] For coverage of Romney see A Ripley, "Romney says President Made 'Colossal Mistake' on Vietnam," *New York Times*, 20 November 1967, p. 28. For McCall's statement, see P Kihss, "McCall Says Johnson Falters on Antipoverty Aid," ibid., p. 37.

points and that any remaining questions on progress in Vietnam is, "not because anybody questions the sincerity or even the evidence," of the two men.[99]

This represented a win for the administration's focus on Vietnam; while Reston and indeed public sentiment remained unconvinced by Johnson's own rhetoric on the war and the United States' chances of success, Bunker and Westmoreland provided a trustworthy and solid basis for moving forward, something that the Johnsonian public affairs strategy previously failed to provide. Clark Clifford noted in his memoirs, "At the time, Westmoreland's briefings and predictions impressed almost everyone, including me."[100] For his part, Westmoreland believed his most important address during his November press tour was at an address to the National Press Club on 21 November.[101] "It is significant," noted Westmoreland in this speech, "that the enemy has not won a major battle in over a year." The General's optimism was spelled out for the National Press Club when he noted, "I am absolutely certain that whereas in 1965 the enemy was winning, today he is certainly losing."[102] This garnered further positive press attention; Neil Sheehan's article on the matter was on the front page of the following day's *New York Times*.[103] However, Johnson was aware that the press was still sceptical regarding much of the information coming from Vietnam; he noted in a meeting with Bunker, Westmoreland and others in a meeting prior to the National Press Club address that the press believed they were lying about official casualty lists.[104] Evidently, the worry over press motives had not left Johnson or members of the administration.

As has been noted, Bunker and Westmoreland could not completely achieve the Johnson objective of improving public relations with the administration. Ultimately, it was time for Johnson himself to take the matter into his own hands on Vietnam. While Westmoreland and Bunker were

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[99] J Reston, "Washington: Why Westmoreland and Bunker Are Optimistic," *New York Times*, 22 November 1967, p. 46.
[100] C Clifford, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 453.
[101] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 234.
[102] For the text of Gen. Westmoreland's speech, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Public Affairs, 1969), pp. 1034-38.
[103] N Sheehan, "Westmoreland Sure of Victory: Calls Dak To Battle Start of 'Great Defeat' for Foe," *New York Times*, 22 November 1967, p. 1.
[104] Notes of Meeting, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967, doc. 409, 21 November, p. 1051.

doing good work in putting forward the administration's agenda for going forward in the war, Johnson took the offensive in a televised press conference on 17 November. He defended his policies passionately, using a lapel microphone to move in between the journalists and attendees. The Johnsonian distrust of the press came to the fore; he may well have been directing a swipe at the press when he answered a question on dissent: "I do think that some people are irresponsible, make untrue statements, and ought to be cautious and careful when they are dealing with the problem involving their men at the front."[105] Gone was the stoic, "Presidential," style of the previous four years and in its place was something more akin to his days in the Senate; James Reston described the conference as, "as effective a performance as has been seen at a White House news conference in years."[106] Praised across the political spectrum by friends and foes alike, this new style was a vast departure from the Johnson of old. While not everyone was convinced – Reston elaborated in his column that, "He is trying desperately now to carry his case on the war to the nation." However, the general consensus was that the conference was strong – even Republican Senator Richard Nixon's advisors thought that the conference showed, "the real LBJ rather than the pious hypocrite we've become accustomed to."[107] The press conference of 17 November was a high point; a calculated and strong performance which showed that a pro-active approach to answering questions that relied on the traditional Johnsonian style could still win the President more admirers. That he refused to follow up the press conference at the following engagement shows the inability of his administration to tie Johnson down to a cohesive and permanent strategy. For Johnson, the instinct to remain stoic and – as he saw it – Presidential during public engagements was too strong; he returned to the almost wooden style of dictating press conferences that was not appealing to journalists. Following this, the President made nationally televised remarks on Vietnam at the AFL-CIO conference on 12 December. Another set piece of the Johnson public relations tour took place on 18 December, when he agreed to a taped "Conversation with the President," in which he

[105] L B Johnson, "The President's News Conference," 17 November 1967. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28555.
[106] J Reston, "Washington: President Johnson's First Four Years," *New York Times*, 19 November, p. 216.
[107] W Glavin, adviser to Richard Nixon, quoted in Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 204.

answered the questions of journalists in a conversational style at a taped interview. He emphasised his views on dissent and discussed issues of foreign and domestic policy with several journalists.[108] Following this, Johnson set off on a whirlwind world tour, ostensibly to attend the funeral of Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt. He also visited the countries of South Vietnam, Thailand and stopped at the Vatican to visit with the Pope. Turner notes that the tour did nothing to help the President's standing with the press, quoting the *Washington Post*'s Carroll Kirkpatrick as saying, "The President is driving staff and press unmercifully. There have been two heart attacks already because of the unrelenting pace. It is worth noting that in an article on presidential travel and approval ratings, Darcy and Richman have found no correlation between the two, lending credence to Kirkpatrick's view.[109] Press facilities have been sub-standard throughout, no advance notice; in some cases an obvious and deliberate attempt to mislead the press about destinations."[110] Evidently, despite the attempts to court the press and public throughout November and December, the old Johnsonian distrust of the press resurfaced, and the only pro-active thing about his circumnavigation of the globe in December was his attempt at secrecy towards the press corps following him, undermining the efforts of the previous two months.

As the year drew to a close, the President was still embattled by Vietnam, and the gloom was not helped by an inconsistent press strategy throughout the year. However, the administration faced significant problems out with their own inability to promote a strong and coherent line on foreign and domestic policy issues. Rising inflation and violent race riots caused concern that the President had lost his consensus and was unable to control the country, causing his mid-year ratings to plummet and leave the credibility gap wide open. To mitigate this, the late year public relations campaign finally saw the beginnings of a cohesive strategy towards the press, but even at this most vital point Johnson himself could not decide on his approach to media matters; as James Reston put

[108] For the discussion, with audio and video, see the University of Virginia's Miller Center's transcript, accessed on 4 May 2017 at http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-5921.
[109] R E Darcy and A Richman, "Presidential Travel and Public Opinion," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 85-90.
[110] C Kirkpatrick, quoted in Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 210.

it after the 17 November press conference, "He is experimenting a great deal now with new techniques."[111] The use of Westmoreland and Bunker to give their positive impressions on Vietnam was, however, an important marker of how the President wished to move on in 1968, and a sign of a strong media strategy for the following year. The final Gallup Poll of the year, published on 31 December, put Lyndon Johnson's approval rating at 46%.[112] The signs of recovery from the slump of August were no doubt there for the president, and his campaign of the later year undoubtedly showed a positive side to the administration, but it would be important to consolidate and build on this in 1968.

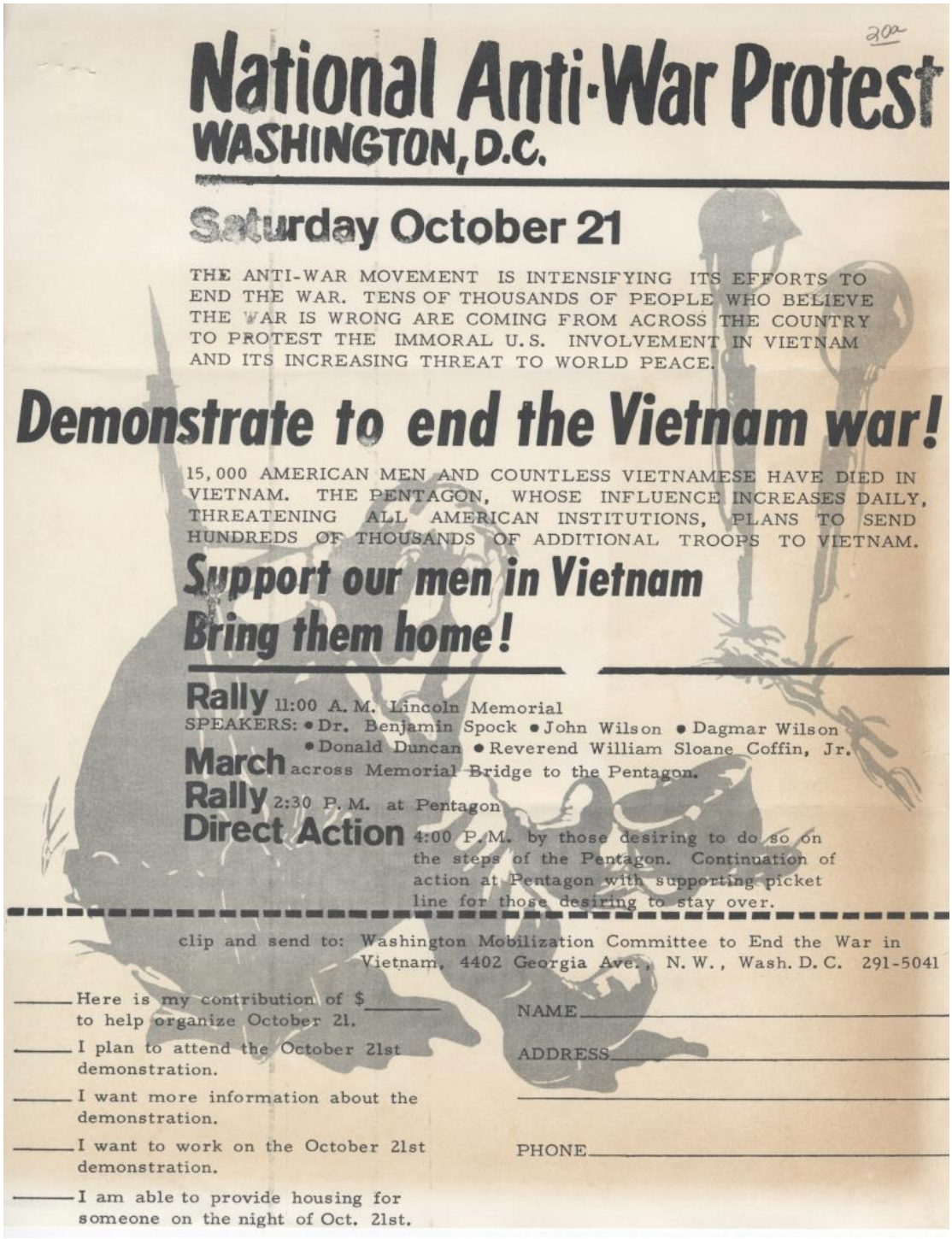
[111] J Reston, "President Johnson's First Four Years," *New York Times*, 18 November 1967, p. 216.
[112] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2096.

Appendix A – Image of Detroit race riot aftermath, July 1967

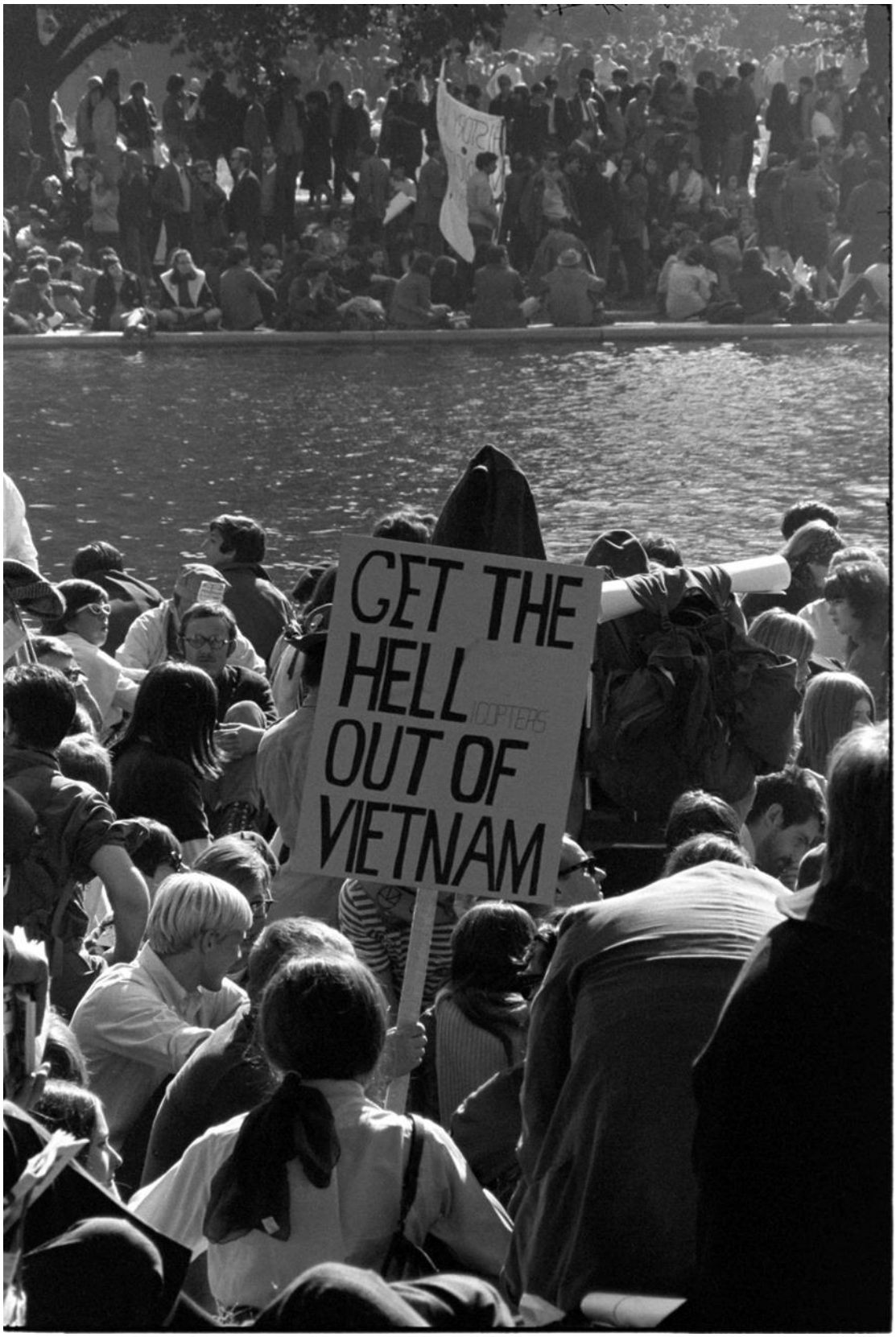
1967 Detroit Riots: 24 Harrowing Photos Of A City On Fire (allthatsinteresting.com)

[This image has been redacted for electronic copies of this thesis due to rights issues, and can be accessed at the link provided above.]

Appendix B: Poster advertising the peace march on Washington D.C., October 1967. Taken from the Lyndon B Johnson Library



Appendix C: Protestors in Washington, 21 October 1967. From the Lyndon B Johnson Library



Chapter 6 – 1968: Tet, Plummeting Popularity and the Ultimate Failure of the Johnsonian Press Strategy

1968 was shaping up to be a pivotal one for both the Johnson administration and for America as a whole. Later termed "The Year the Dream Died," by veteran journalist Jules Witcover,[1] the country had much to deal with. On 23 January, a week before the Tet Offensive began, North Korea seized the *USS Pueblo*, claiming ship violated its territory. The crew would not be released until 11 December. In March, LBJ announced a bombing halt and removed himself from the race for the presidency, declaring that he would refuse his party's nomination. Political unrest was underlined by two high profile assassinations; civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. was shot by James Earl Ray on 4 April, just a week before President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 on 11 April, and Senator Robert Kennedy (D-New York) was targeted for his views on Israel by the assassin Sirhan Sirhan, dying on 6 June. Kennedy and Johnson were not on good terms since the latter declined to name Kennedy as his running mate in 1964. The economic unrest and public dissatisfaction with the war exploded into violence following King's death, and again as demonstrators picketed the Democratic National Convention in August – a well publicised incident involving security officers and reporters Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite created further publicity issues for the Democrats. On 31 October, Johnson announced that a complete cessation of all air, naval and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam was ordered to start the following day. The following week, Richard Nixon became the President elect, defeating Johnson's vice president, Hubert Humphrey, and giving a clear indication of negative public opinion on the Johnson administration's progress. This chapter will focus on the opening months of 1968, prior to Johnson's announcement of 31 March that he would not seek re-election in November, but will also look at the fall out of this decision and the final months of Johnson's time in office; several of the defining moments of 1968 mentioned above occurred after Johnson's withdrawal from the Democratic election process and it would be remiss not to evaluate the response of the administration to these.

[1] J Witcover, *The Year the Dream Died: Revisiting 1968 in America* (New York: Warner Books, 1997), p. 1.

Having plummeted in the polls, the administration rallied in the final months of 1967 with a strong and cohesive public relations strategy that targeted fears over Vietnam and the length of the war. A front-page report in the *New York Times* on New Year's Day was positive about the White House press secretary, George Christian. Reviewing his performance on "Meet the Nation," Columbia Broadcasting Service's (CBS) television show, Max Frankel noted that Christian was, "unflappable," but also noted that his three predecessors were "driven to varying degrees of despair."[2] The article noted Christian's impact since taking on the role of press secretary: "Mr. Christian came to the White House with a fresh eye and applied an outsider's judgement to the low state of relations between the President and the press."[3] The piece notes that Johnson himself credited Christian with aiding his relationship with the press, and was overall complimentary of Christian's performance. This is important to take stock of; Johnson's relationship with the press was never a mutually friendly one and previous chapters have noted how the press, and particularly the White House press corps, did not approve of Johnson's erratic behaviour towards press conferences and contact with journalists. This, when combined with his administration's previous inability to form a pro-active press strategy, had been severely disruptive to the administration, and certainly contributed to the siege mentality that many members of the administration have been described as feeling against those who were critical of Johnson and his policies. That Christian, described by Max Frankel as an "outsider," came in and assisted Johnson in his press relations in the months since his appointment was an important positive step. Nevertheless, the question of the credibility gap still remained, and members of the press were still deeply distrustful of Johnson and his proclamations on the war, as Peter Braestrup noted.[4] Johnson was awarded *TIME Magazine*'s Man of the Year award, although the compliment was somewhat insincere; the President was depicted as Shakespeare's King Lear on the cover. The analogy of a king descending into madness and isolation was not a kind one, nor was the description of the article that followed. "It was sometimes hard to

[2] M Frankel, "Johnson's Press Secretary is Unflappable as Ever," *New York Times*, 1 January 1968, p. 1.
[3] Ibid., p. 6.
[4] Transcript, Peter Braestrup Oral History I, 1 March 1982, T Gittinger, p. 16, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

tell whether the rancor aroused by Johnson stemmed from his policies or his personality," one stinging comment read. The article included a compilation of political cartoons, each more negative than the last, and a graph showing the President's falling popularity.[5] The article further noted that he, "allowed the Democratic National Committee's once smooth machinery to rust," but concluded that Johnson was not dead in the water yet. "The greatest Presidents," noted the article, "are those who have emerged during periods of severe strain, domestic or foreign. Johnson still has a chance to stand among them."[6] The negative view of Johnson put forward in the article was reinforced in a letter to *TIME* two weeks later; Carol McCabe from Chicago stated, "I believe a leader has an obligation of letting his followers know where he is leading them."[7] The damaging assessment aired by McCabe – a student, according to the letter's sign off – echoed the sentiments of many critics of the Johnson administration. As successful as the public relations campaign of late 1967 was, there was still work to be done in restoring the President's faltering image and narrowing the credibility gap. For this, a pro-active press strategy would be needed.

[5] "Man of the Year," *TIME Magazine*, 5 January 1968, pp. 16-18.
[6] Ibid., p. 22.
[7] Ibid., p. 7.

https://time.com/vault/issue/1968-01-05/page/1/

[This image has been redacted for electronic copies of this thesis due to rights issues, and can be accessed at the link provided above.]

TIME Magazine Cover – 5 January 1968. LBJ is shown as King Lear.

Despite dissenting views such as Carol McCabe's response to Johnson's nomination as *TIME*'s Man of the Year, his standing in public opinion recovered slightly. With his public persona on the precipice in terms of newspaper and magazine coverage, Johnson announced in his 1 January press conference that, "We are very hopeful we can make advances towards peace," before the end

of the calendar year when asked by a journalist.[1] He also had to deal with the fallout of his meeting with Pope Paul VI at the end of his tour of the previous year; *Newsweek* described it as being, "Less than cordial," but Johnson denied this, describing such claims as "just made out of cloth." He responded, "We told them it was just completely untrue."[2] Alongside this critical line of questioning, the first Gallup poll of the year noted that 49% of respondents now disapproved of the way Johnson was handling the situation in Vietnam.[3] His personal standing was not strong, either, although it had been lower during parts of 1967 – a poll taken amongst respondents between 4th and 9 January showed a 48% approval rating for the President, almost ten per cent higher than his lows of the previous August.[4] Fred Panzer, who was in charge of keeping track of public opinion, informed Johnson at the start of the year that he was looking to "cultivate" Louis Harris, whose polling was used by CBS, and sent him a book containing presidential speeches. Harris' favourable response to this saw him meet with Governor John Connally, Johnson's friend in Texas, to discuss poll results and receive an invitation to a White House dinner.[5] Interestingly, the syndicated Harris poll on 8 January was much more friendly towards the president; Harris maintained that,

> Only two months after a Harris survey showed that all four of the leading Republican presidential contenders could defeat President Johnson, a special survey now shows Mr. Johnson riding a new crest of popularity that would make him the favourite if the election were held now.[6]

Harris showed Johnson leading over Governors George Wallace and George Romney, and former Vice President Richard Nixon, and in a dead heat with New York's governor, Nelson

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[1] L B Johnson, "The President's News Conference at the LBJ Ranch," 1 January 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28693.
[2] Ibid.
[3] G Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 2099.
[4] Ibid., p. 2103.
[5] Panzer's courting of Harris is mentioned by B Altschuler in *LBJ and the Polls* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1990), p. 77.
[6] L Harris, "Harris Survey: LBJ Rebounds to Lead GOP Contenders," *Winona Daily News* (Winona, MN), 8 January 1968, p. 4.

Rockefeller. While the President's polling situation was still mixed, this was to be expected given the polarising effect of Vietnam on the United States; there were clear signs of recovery in public faith in the administration following the concerted effort to appeal to public sentiment at the end of 1967. In order to continue the improvement, it was now vital for the president to build on the previous months' work with his State of the Union Speech.

As with previous State of the Union addresses, the speechwriting process began several months earlier and continued until the day of 17 January when the President would address Congress. A memorandum sent by Henry Owen, who worked under Walt Rostow in the State Department's policy planning staff, on 29 November 1967 picked up on the administration's tendency to allow journalistic pressure. Marked, "Where Do We Go From Here," Owen's note announced that, "The Administration is taking the offensive," and directed several points which Johnson could potentially include in his speech to drive this message home.[7] That it was necessary to point out that the administration was no longer on the defensive speaks volumes about prior public affairs strategies. In a memorandum forwarded by Joe Califano to speechwriter Harry McPherson on 16 December, domestic policy staffer Fred Bohen noted that the mood of the nation was, "somber," with, "bitterness, unhappiness, tension and impatience." He felt the speech would be judged on the frankness with which Johnson addressed the nation's problems and the clarity of his vision for the future.[8] Evidently, White House Chief of Staff Califano agreed with this summary, ensuring that McPherson – who had been integral to the crafting of the 1967 State of the Union speech – saw the memorandum, which provided numerous ideas for writing the speech. Bohen's dramatic summary of the mood of the nation was equally indicative of the mood of many within the administration by

[7] Confidential Memorandum from H Owen [no recipient specified], "Where Do We Go From Here?", 29 November 1967, "Annual Message To Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, box 260, Lyndon B Johnson Library, Austin, Texas [LBJ Library].
[8] Memorandum from Fred Bohen to Joseph A Califano, 1 December 1967 (Forwarded to Harry McPherson on 16 December 1967), "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, box 260, LBJ Library.

this point in time.[9] As with previous State of the Union addresses, suggestions were taken from a variety of different sources, both within and outside the administration; Betsy Levin, special assistant to Arthur Goldberg at the United Nations, gave several ideas on domestic policy concerns.[10] Congressman Donald J. Irwin (D-Michigan) wrote to the President to "urge" him to include a note on the International Education Act of 1966 and its need for funding.[11] Staff members such as Ben Wattenberg and Harry McPherson were also heavily involved in the drafting of the speech, itself.

On 13 January, four days before the State of the Union address, Robert Kintner sent a thirteen-page memorandum to Johnson stating his views on the speech. Kintner noted that from his extensive experience of the television industry he felt Johnson had chosen the best possible time to televise the speech to reach the largest potential audience. He noted that the speech was as important to the formation of public impressions as the first Kennedy-Nixon debate in 1960, and advised that "the President must prepare for the talk as any actor would rehearse."[12] He also advised that in terms of television performance, "the public wants to see Lyndon B. Johnson as he is," and advised on a natural delivery that emphasised sacrificing last minute changes for a speech that Johnson knew off by heart; something that was never the case with previous addresses.[13] The Johnsonian method leaned heavily on multiple speechwriters working on drafts of the speech sometimes until the hours before the speech was to be given. The importance of the speech was not lost on Kintner, who was a key advisor on the subject of television; Johnson utilised Kintner's experience as former President of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) since he joined the

[9] In his memoirs, Nicholas Katzenbach noted, "Nineteen sixty-eight was my eighth consecutive year in government and it was by far the most depressing and frustrating year for me – and I think for many others as well." See N DeB Katzenbach, *Some Of It Was Fun: Working with RFK and LBJ* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), p. 277 and passim.

[10] Memorandum from Betsy Levin to Don Furtado, forwarded to Joseph A. Califano on 12 December 1967, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 260, LBJ Library.

[11] Memorandum from Donald J Irwin to President Lyndon B Johnson, 20 December 1967, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, box 260, LBJ Library.

[12] Memorandum from Kintner to President Johnson, 13 January 1968, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson, box 260, LBJ Library, p. 2.

[13] Ibid., p. 3. Kintner also advised (p. 4) that Johnson should work with a professional "if" he decided to run in the 1968 election.

President's advisory staff in 1966. Kintner used his involvement in the industry to point out some of the errors of previous years; for example, Bill Moyers had given the text of the 1967 speech to the media, "between 7:30pm and 8:00pm," losing printing of the text in early editions of newspapers in the Eastern Time Zone, particularly New York, for a speech that went to air at 9.33pm.[14] Kintner also noted that editors were, "beside themselves with anger," at the chaotic nature of the press contact from the administration.[15] This parallels the new attitude of the government since the San Antonio speech; the delay by Moyers could be attributed to the administration wanting to keep the text of the speech from falling into the hands of critics or a simple lack of regard for the press on Johnson's part or even both of these, but as Kintner pointed out, whether it was intentional or not angering the press did not help the administration in any way. The memo did help to reinforce the siege mentality and negative view of the media within the administration; Kintner believed that CBS offered the Republican Party an hour after the speech to air their – probably negative – views to the nation. This strengthened the Johnsonian belief that the press were looking for ways to discredit him.

Johnson was advised by Kintner to practice the speech with close advisors to ensure that he could recite it from memory and give a good television performance; a memorandum from Elizabeth Carpenter, press secretary and staff director for Lady Bird Johnson, suggests that he did indeed deliver the speech to her. She began her list of corrections by noting that, "You deliver it better than adequately but you could do it superbly," suggesting that Kintner's suggestion of practice was a worthwhile one.[16] The administration did not heed Kintner's advice that last minute re-writes should

[14] The 9pm time of the speech is noted in Lyndon B Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," 10 January 1967. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28338. Kintner recommended later in the memo that the text be released to newspapers, magazines and broadcasters no later than 6:00pm.
[15] Memorandum from Kintner to Johnson, p. 5.
[16] Memorandum from Liz Carpenter to the President, 16 January 1968 (mis-labelled as 16 November), "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 260, LBJ Library. Carpenter was a journalist and public speaker in her own right, and contributed to some of Johnson's speeches. She also created the "White House Humor Group," who, Robert Schlesinger notes, would meet in her office every week or so, "sip scotch and try to come up with jokes for Johnson's upcoming speeches." See

be sacrificed; Cater sent a message to Johnson on 16 January strongly advising that he let McPherson add another 400 words to the draft.[17] A redraft of one portion was sent to Johnson by Califano at 10:10am on the day of the speech; the chaotic nature of Johnsonian speechwriting remained unchanged.[18]

Califano apparently worked through the night at the President's behest, sending a draft at 2am on the morning of the speech reflecting Johnson's requested changes and giving a word count.[19] Johnson himself agonised until the last minute over whether to include a passage announcing his withdrawal from seeking the nomination of the Democratic Party for President in the forthcoming elections; he decided against it on this occasion, although he claiming to his biographer Doris Kearns that he asked his aide Horace Busby to write an additional section to the end of the State of the Union address making such an announcement. Kearns notes that his explanation of why he did not act on this – that he forgot the paper with the text – is unconvincing.[20] In his informal memoirs, dictated to Kearns, he elaborated that he would not have read the statement regardless. "I was asking the Congress that night for a heavy and demanding program," he stated. "To couple such a request with a statement that I was not going to run for President might suggest to various people that I was not willing to fight for what I was asking."[21] Much has been made of whether Johnson really intended to abdicate the Presidency before his position became untenable; the purpose of mentioning this is not to question his intention but to show the difficulty that anyone involved in preparing the address faced; without the full co-operation of their leader, it was impossible for speechwriters to construct a cohesive message. Johnson did not mention this to anyone but trusted

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R Schlesinger, *White House Ghosts: Presidents and Their Speechwriters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), p. 177.

[17] Memorandum from Douglass Cater to the President, 16 January 1968, in Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 260, 17 January 1968, LBJ Library.

[18] Memorandum from Joe Califano to the President, 17 January 1968, at 10:10am, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 260, LBJ Library.

[19] Memorandum from Joe Califano to the President, 17 January 1968, at 2:00am, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Statements of Lyndon B Johnson, box 263, LBJ Library.

[20] D Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (London: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 343.

[21] L B Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Henry Holt, 1971), p. 430. Turner also notes this exchange in *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War,* p. 213, and Johnson's difficulties at the beginning of 1968.

advisors and confidants such as George Christian and Lady Bird. The secrecy shown by Johnson was in this case extreme in nature. The difficulty of composing an important speech at such an important time under these conditions is evident from this. It would not be possible to continue the strong and pro-active approach towards Johnson's public profile that was taken in the final months of 1967 if he retreated into his previous, more secretive, habits.

The State of the Union address, itself, began, predictably, with a discussion on the state of Vietnam. Johnson noted that the North's strategy rested on the "hope that America's will to persevere can be broken," and confirmed his commitment to the formula he outlined in his address at San Antonio in September. Unlike in previous State of the Union speeches, he moved swiftly on to discuss other pressing matters of foreign policy. In terms of domestic affairs, Johnson outlined the issues faced by America in the previous year that damaged his credibility, including rapid inflation and inner city rioting, and affirmed his commitment to resolving the issues. He concluded by stating that many of the problems faced by America could be solved by the country's bicentennial year in 1976, and summed up the State of the Union as, "seeking, building, tested many times in this past year—and always equal to the test.[22] As Johnson himself later stated, large scale requests were made of Congress; $2.1 billion was proposed for a "manpower program," with $1 billion for the Model Cities program which would "help meet the crisis in the cities of America." Large scale housing programs and a child health program to provide health services for new mothers and their children were also requested.

Unsurprisingly, headlines the following day focused on the massive budget required for Johnson's requests; the *New York Times* ran with the $186 billion figure Johnson eventually quoted.[23] An editorial the same day commented, "the money has drained into Vietnam that should

[22] L B. Johnson: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," 17 January, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28738.

[23] H Smith, "Johnson's Budget $186 billion: Wants Gold Reserve Freed; Seeks an Assurance by Hanoi," *New York Times*, 28 January 1968, p. 1.

have nurtured [the Great Society's] beginnings and transformed them into sturdy accomplishments."[24] Writing on the speech, James Reston was less than impressed, calling it "something less than a triumph. It was a good political road map for 1968, but it did nothing to remove the restlessness it deplored."[25] The Associated Press reported that "key members" of Congress were already looking to cut the budget that Johnson proposed, and quoted Representative Frank T. Bow (R-Ohio) as saying[26] he expected strong support for a resolution to cut spending by $10 billion. *TIME Magazine* noted in their 26 January edition that Lyndon Johnson was, "interrupted by applause 53 times during his State of the Union address," but this was no compliment, as the article continued, "the cheers were mostly perfunctory and remarkably partisan."[27] Picking up on the Johnsonian method of last minute additions to the speech, *TIME* printed an anecdote about the hours before the address;

> Five hours before the scheduled delivery of the speech on a nationwide television hookup, Johnson announced to those in his oval office: 'I'm not going to let anyone put anything else in this. All you want to do is add words, and I'm trying to cut words.[28]

Again, a major nationwide publication was pointing out the difficult and chaotic nature of the Johnsonian speechwriting process. Embarrassingly for the president, *TIME* noted that "some 250 of the 535 members of the House and Senate," did not attend the address. While there are no figures for the attendances of previous addresses, the fact that a major publication pointed out that such a large amount of representatives were not there is striking. With regard to Vietnam, much of the damage was done. The pollster Louis Harris has noted from his experience with opinion polls and the American public that "By the end of 1967, a majority of people were prepared to level two withering personal criticisms of President Johnson: 'He has not been honest with the people on Vietnam," and

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[24] "The State of the Union," *New York Times*," 18 January 1968, p. 38.
[25] J Reston, "Washington: 'Why Then, This Restlessness,'" *New York Times*, 19 January 1968, p. 46.
[26] Associated Press, "Key Solons Would Slice More From 'Tight Budget,'" *Bridgeport Post (*Bridgeport, CT*)*, 18 January 1968, p. 50.
[27] "The Cities: The Crucible," *TIME Magazine*, 26 January 1968, p. 11.
[28] "The Presidency: Bar Grease," *TIME Magazine*, 26 January 1968, p. 13.

'He has raised false hopes for the war too often.'"[29] Ultimately, the latter criticism would prove to be prescient; the public relations campaign of 1967 that was pushed so hard by the President and spearheaded by positive press reports from General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker would come crashing down less than two weeks after the State of the Union address as the Tet Offensive began.

Before this, however, the *USS Pueblo* incident threatened to cause the administration a severe headache. The crew of the Navy ship (one of whom died) was seized by North Korea and charged with encroaching on that country's sovereign waters. An editorial in the following day's *New York Times* noted that

> If the American vessel did penetrate North Korean waters – as American ships were tardily acknowledged to have penetrated waters claimed by North Vietnam prior to the Tonkin incidents – the United States Government must bear at least a share of the responsibility for what has happened. [30]

The editorial further condemned the administration for allowing a vessel, "presumably crammed with sensitive intelligence equipment," to fall into hostile hands. *TIME* included on its 2 February front cover a picture of the *Pueblo*'s skipper – Lloyd Bucher – and noted in its editorial that official sources on the matter were almost impossible to come by – yet another example of the Johnson administration's tendency to react – or in this case not react – to news as it broke.[31] The magazine's commentary noted that the *Pueblo* incident represented, "an abrupt object lesson to Americans that the world's greatest power can be roundly and resoundingly put down by the most miniscule of foes."[32] Evidently, the overwhelming conclusion drawn by the media in the days following the seizure of the *Pueblo* was that the situation was something of an embarrassment for the Johnson administration. A meeting on 24 January between several of the President's key

[29] L Harris, *The Anguish of Change* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 60.
[30] "The Pueblo Incident," *New York Times*, 24 January 1968, p. 44.
[31] J R Shepley, "Letter from The Publisher," *TIME Magazine*, 26 January 1968, p. 9.
[32] "The War," *TIME Magazine*, 26 January 1968, p. 13.

advisors saw George Christian raise the question of how to deal with the press. As with previous crises, the reaction of the administration was to withdraw; the minutes of the meetings noted that "it was suggested that [Christian] saw the capture of the *Pueblo…*was being closely studied prior to the President's decision on his course of action."[33] A meeting later that day saw Secretary Rusk discuss the use of the UN Security Council to engage with public feeling on the matter.[34] Clark Clifford repeated this view to the President the following day, noting that the government did not want to send in planes, or this would become public knowledge and engender further critical press reporting.[35] The suggestion to move through the United Nations was evidently taken up as the United States sent messages to the North Koreans through a United Nations contact to set up face-to-face discussions on the matter of the *Pueblo*.[36] While the issues surrounding the *Pueblo* do not necessarily relate to Vietnam, the incident was an embarrassing one for the Johnson administration in any context; the *Pueblo* was a "spy ship," carrying sensitive information, and, as noted by the *New York Times*, should not have been allowed to fall into communist hands. It was a failure on the part of the government's foreign and defence policies and by remaining tight-lipped on the matter, as reported by *TIME*, the administration once again retreated into the old Johnsonian tactic of press distrust and secrecy. The incident therefore represented another indictment of Johnson's ability in the field of foreign policy and diplomacy (the crew was released after being held for eleven months; the ship remains in North Korean hands to this day). As it was, attention from the *Pueblo*'s capture was quickly diverted, as the Viet Cong kicked off the Tet Offensive on 30 January.

As discussed in Chapter Four, even as 1967 drew to a close, key advisors to Johnson believed that the war would be won and America would prevail, given time. Figures such as Dean Rusk, Walt

[33] Summary Minutes of Meeting, 24 January 1968 [10:30-11:45am], in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XXIX, Part I, Korea, doc. 217.
[34] Minutes on Meeting, 24 January [6pm], in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XXIX, Part I, Korea, doc. 220.
[35] Notes of Meeting, 25 January 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XXIX, Part I, Korea, doc. 226.
[36] Editorial Note, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XXIX, Part I, Korea, doc. 247.

Rostow and the Joint chiefs of Staff appeared to be in agreement on this.[37] The Tet Offensive blindsided many in the administration and drastically changed the prevailing mood on the war. The difficulty faced in early January was that of pushing for negotiations – Johnson's 'Special Consultant' John Roche noted in a memorandum to the President on 18 November, "We are getting butchered in the press for 'over-caution' vis-à-vis negotiations".[38] Former President and US Army General Dwight Eisenhower noted in a discussion with General Andrew Goodpaster that "TV coverage of bases that are hit by mortar fire is damaging to our people's understanding of the war."[39] In Vietnam, meanwhile, Westmoreland had misgivings about the observation of the annual truce that was declared for the Tet Lunar New Year celebrations and argued with Washington over for how long – if at all – any truce should be honoured.[40] In a telegram to General Wheeler on 22 January he noted, "The bulk of our evidence suggests that the enemy is conducting a short term surge effort, possibly designed to improve his chances of gaining his ends through political means."[41] Johnson stated in a meeting with the Democratic leadership on 23 January that reports showed a "full scale" attack on the airstrip at Khe Sanh, near the Demilitarized Zone, alongside attacks on other areas and violence in South Vietnamese capital Saigon.[42] Nevertheless, the holiday ceasefire began and the North Vietnamese strategy came into effect. Masses of troops attacked seven cities in northern areas of South Vietnam in the early hours of 30 January, and 24 hours later further attacks began throughout South Vietnam, including a particularly audacious assault on Saigon and the beginnings of a siege at the former imperial capital Hue, where some of the most brutal combat of the war would be seen over a three week period. In all, around 85,000 North Vietnamese fighters attacked,

[37] On the Wise Men's meeting, see previous chapter and C Page, *U. S. Official Propaganda During the Vietnam War, 1965-1973: The Limits of Persuasion* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 36.
[38] Memorandum from the President's Special Consultant (Roche) to President Johnson, January 18 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 17.
[39] Memorandum for the Record, 18 January 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 20.
[40] R E Ford, *Tet 1968: Understanding the Surprise* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1995), pp. 102-3.
[41] Details of Westmoreland's telegram were discussed at the President's weekly Tuesday lunch with National Security advisory staff, notes of which are found in Notes of Meeting, 23 January 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 23.
[42] Notes of meeting, 22 January 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 22.

hitting 64 district capitals and dozens of smaller towns. The fighting very quickly took its toll on the home front, as death rates reached up to 500 per week during the worst times and a Gallup Poll taken in March reflected badly on the Johnson administration; only 36% agreed with his conduct during his Presidency and fewer still, 26%, agreed with his conduct over the course of the Vietnam conflict.[43] The Tet Offensive lasted until the last few days in March, by which point President Johnson's credibility as the leader of the country had been completely eroded by headlines and articles from newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, which suggested that the "Whole Vietnam effort may be doomed."[44] As early as 1 February a TV network special for NBC largely condemned the military response to Tet, with the presenter Robert Goralski concluding that, "The communists may not be winning the war, as the Pentagon claims, but they certainly don't seem to be losing it either," while Jeff Gralnick reporting for American network CBS stated that Tet was "The exact opposite of what American leaders have, for months, been leading us to expect."[45]

With that single sentence, Gralnick managed to pinpoint the problems already present in US government propaganda efforts in the run-up to Tet. While simultaneously ignoring signs of unrest and tactical change from the Viet Cong, Washington professed to the general public that an end was in sight, and that the war could soon be over. When the Offensive happened, the public was shocked at the actions of the North Vietnamese, but the biggest reaction was against the war hawks who stood up just months earlier to insist that an attack like this simply could not happen. Images soon began to pour out of Vietnam following the Offensive of allied behavior. A now infamous image of South Vietnamese Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a captured and bound Viet Cong in the head won its photographer a Pulitzer Prize but it would be an understatement to say that it did not help Johnson's war effort. The photographer – Eddie Adams of the Associated Press – would later express his regret over the image. The idea that it had done more harm than good to the war

[43] Page, *U.S. Official Propaganda During the Vietnam War*, p. 5.
[44] Ibid.
[45] P Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 133.

effort, "long dismayed Mr. Adams, who accepted Brig. Gen. Loan's contention that the man he shot murdered a friend of his, a South Vietnamese army colonel, as well as the colonel's wife and six children."[46] Similarly, an image of American embassy official George Jacobsen leaning from a window of the US embassy in Saigon with a pistol in hand did not allay American fears – Gustainis agrees that "The myth of Viet Cong decline leading to imminent American victory was effectively undermined."[47]

100 Photographs that Changed the World by Life - The Digital Journalist

[This image has been redacted for electronic copies of this thesis due to rights issues, and can be accessed at the link provided above.]

Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing suspected Viet Cong soldier Nguyen Van Lem

Again, television and film media completely humiliated the American government and their efforts to subdue anti-war sentiment. The picture of Nguyen Ngoc Loan in particular was an example of how effectively a single picture could be used as propaganda, in this case against Johnson's goals in Vietnam. The administration had no strategy for combating the flood of uncensored information

[46] A Grunberg, "Eddie Adams, Journalist Who Showed Violence of Vietnam, Dies at 71," *New York Times*, 20 September 2004, accessed on 5 June 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/20/arts/eddie-adams-journalist-who-showed-violence-of-vietnam-dies-at-71.html?_r=0.
[47] Gustainis, *American Rhetoric in the Vietnam War*, pp. 43-44.

that found its way into the American news media following Tet. To drive the point home even further to the president, another "NBC Special" on 10 March contrasted Johnson's and Westmoreland's assertions of the previous autumn with images of the brutality of Tet, questioning the validity of the statements by the commander-in-chief and his top general, shattering their credibility and concluding, "The war, as the Johnson administration defined it, is being lost."[48]

The immediate aftermath of the Tet Offensive saw the government position in shambles; Westmoreland was abruptly pulled from Vietnam to be moved upstairs as the army's chief of staff on 22 March.[49] The fallout of Tet also effectively killed Johnson's hopes of running for the Presidency again in November 1968 – while public opinion was gradually turning against him for some time, it was clear by the end of the March 1968 that a watershed moment had passed. Peter Braestrup would later say that, "Johnson knew something was coming and still didn't tell the people."[50] And while the tide did not completely turn against the war, Johnson was no longer trusted to lead the way. Eugene McCarthy almost unseated Johnson in the New Hampshire primary; an unheard of feat against an incumbent President. Robert Kennedy announced his own candidacy, using his popularity to appropriate the anti-war and civil rights causes and inflict a potentially huge embarrassment on Johnson – so that relinquishing his claim on the Presidency suddenly seemed to Johnson the only way to keep the country together. The Tet Offensive made Johnson's propaganda look outdated and hopelessly out of touch with reality; he and Westmoreland were effectively felled by their involvement with the 1967 drive to inform the public that the war was close to an end. When faced with an offensive that ruined their credibility, both men were given no choice but to relinquish their respective commands. Faith in the US government was greatly shaken by Tet.

The impact of the Tet Offensive going forward was great. Skirmishes and battles under the Tet banner continued throughout 1968 – related fighting was still going on as late as September. As we

[48] D Halberstam, quoted in Gustainis, *American Rhetoric in the Vietnam War*, p. 45.
[49] N Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), p. 720.
[50] P Braestrup Oral History I, p. 16.

have seen, the Offensive caused a massive backlash against the previous propaganda put out by Johnson's government. As time went on, this continued. Vietnam Veterans Against War (VVAW), a movement of former combatants campaigning for peace, grew and some veterans signed up following their experiences. Westmoreland's rhetoric in the immediate aftermath did not help; William Crandell joined VVAW after hearing the General describe Tet as a "Great American victory."[51] As the year progressed, issues within the United States took precedence over Vietnam in news reporting at times; Martin Luther King Jr's assassination in April and Robert Kennedy's two months later were just two of the unsettling stories which filled the newspapers during this time. Franklin goes further than some in assessing what Tet did to America; he signals that it transformed the burgeoning anti-war movement into an anti-imperialist movement. The anti-war paper *Viet-Report* used Tet to re-appraise other US sponsored conflicts such as those in Latin America, asking, "How many American boys will have to die before analysts decide to re-appraise Latin American history?"[52]

Neil Sheehan has stated that, "Americans watched the country they were supposed to be rescuing being burned down and blown apart on television – in color."[53]John Hellman has viewed the reaction to Tet as a natural one in a war with no defined enemy, goal or a convincing explanation as to how the conflict fitted in with Americans' view of themselves; "Johnson had attempted to fight a terrible, long war without the tangible elements of myth – a vivid villain, an identifiable grail, a convincing explanation of how unfolding events fit the larger mythic pattern."[54] Tet opened the eyes of a lot of Americans and showed them exactly what kind of war was being fought – while it was not necessarily even a victory for the Viet Cong, it served to break down important psychological barriers on the home front, achieving what the North Vietnamese wanted, unsettling the general American

[51] A E Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 19.
[52] Quoted in H B Franklin, *Vietnam and Other Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), p. 104.
[53] Sheehan, *Bright, Shining Lie*, p. 718.
[54] J Hellman, *American Myth: Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 93.

population – and while most did not actively join the burgeoning anti-war movement immediately following the events of early 1968, a real change occurred. Newspapers now habitually reported in negative terms, in stark contrast to the optimism purveyed by official sources in late 1967. The mood shifted, and enthusiasm from the public would continue to spiral and wane as stories continued to leak about Tet over the following months and years.

As the Tet Offensive continued to cause issues, Johnson's position as leader of the Democratic Party became untenable. Senator Eugene McCarthy (D-Minnesota) announced his intention to run as a counter candidate to Johnson in several of the party's presidential primaries. McCarthy was not a serious option, but saw himself as a counter to the hawkish administration, and wanted the chance to air his views on the war and pressure other Democrats into adopting an anti-war stance. For the first primary in New Hampshire on 12 March, McCarthy poured his resources into campaigning. His strategy paid off, as he won 42% of the vote to Johnson's 49%.[55] The *New York Times* reported the figure at "Around 40%" in its' headline the following day, and noted that Johnson, "turned back a strong challenge," from McCarthy. Following this, Robert Kennedy announced his own campaign for the nomination, attempting to capitalise on the perceived weakness of the president following a difficult night for the administration in New Hampshire. Kennedy was a popular figure in the Democratic Party, having been associated with his brother during the latter's Presidency. As well as this, Johnson and Kennedy were not on good terms. Faced with two strong challenges to his Presidency, Johnson had a decision to make. His health was beginning to fail, and several scares throughout his presidency caused him to take stock of the situation. Nevertheless, the Johnson campaign continued into New Hampshire, and therefore the question remains as to his intentions for the November election. It is important to acknowledge this discussion when looking at Johnson's media strategies; if he had decided early to withdraw from the race, he once again kept everyone in the dark over his choice.

[55] W Weaver, Jr, "M'Carthy[sic] Gets About 40%, Johnson and Nixon On Top In New Hampshire Voting," *New York Times,* 13 March 1968, p. 1.

With such unrest in the background, the administration scrambled to address the situation that Tet caused in Vietnam. On 10 March, Neil Sheehan and Hedrick Smith published a leaked account of the debates going on within the administration on troop levels. Johnson, who treated leaks with the utmost contempt, was incensed. Walt Rostow noted in a memorandum on the day of the leak that he regarded it as "the product of dangerous insubordination."[56] Ultimately, the leak showed up yet another problem with the administration; while it would clearly be unwise to publicise internal dissension, the fact that a source within the administration was willing to leak information to the press in such a manner was a worrying sign for Johnson who now risked being alienated from key staff members as well as the press. Memorandums in the days following the article's publication spoke of the need to clear administration staffers of being party to the leak before allowing them access to information on the war. Once again, the siege mentality and reactive tendencies kicked in; Rostow's denunciation stressed the importance of a quick reaction by the President, but the notes in the file suggest that there was some knowledge within the State Department that such a leak would occur. That this was not communicated to the President and no record exists to show that it was discussed by any of his senior aides is indicative of a real problem in the administration by this point; a lack of communication between all levels and no strategy to combat any potential leaks harmed Johnson's ability to communicate effectively with the media and, by extension, with the public.

At the suggestion of Dean Acheson, one of the still-influential bi-partisan "Wise Men" who shaped American thinking about the Cold War, a working group was to be formed to address questions on where to go with Vietnam policy; chief among them was, "What progress did we make – and fail to make – in the period between mid-1965 and 1968?"[57] The administration was keenly aware of the need to address criticism, and also to ensure that the South Vietnamese were aware of

[56] Information Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, 10 March 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 116.
[57] Telegram From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas, 16 March 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 135.

the domestic situation; South Vietnamese ambassador Bui Dem met with Johnson on 18 March and agreed to underline to his superiors "the mood in the United States and the rising tide of criticism against American involvement" in the war.[58] In the wake of the New Hampshire primary results and Kennedy's announcement, this was vital. A meeting between Johnson and senior Vietnam advisors on 15 March showed the difficulty in announcing troop increases to the public; 98,000 men were to be called up by the army and Johnson wondered aloud if it would be better to, "not announce when they went to Vietnam until after they arrived," showing clearly that the lessons of 1967 had not been learned.[59] George Christian suggested linking the announcement with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's recent discussion with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, but Johnson dismissed this out of hand.[60] The President was, however, painfully aware of the problems Tet caused in public opinion, and so were the people around him. A telegram from Arthur Goldberg – US ambassador to the United Nations – to the Department of State noted, "Recent developments in our country have demonstrated that there is grave concern among the American public whether the course we have set in our Vietnam policy is right."[61] Goldberg felt strongly that a push towards negotiations based on the formula set forth by Johnson in his San Antonio speech the previous year was the best way forward. Dean Rusk and Clark Clifford debated whether this would be an effective strategy; Clifford advised against this and recommended forming the President's committee of senior advisers to discuss the matter again – while the Wise Men unanimously supported the war in 1967, a lot had taken place since then. Nick Katzenbach noted that the Wise Men's second meeting, which followed these discussions, was "a genuine turning point." Katzenbach wrote in his memoirs that "their unanimity was shattered," and that their general shift against the war since Tet, "was a blow to LBJ,

[58] Memorandum for the Record, 19 March 1968, in *FRUS 1964-1968,* vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 140.
[59] Editorial Note (Meeting between the President and his advisors), 15 March 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 130.
[60] Dean Rusk appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to answer questions on the war on 12 March 1966.
[61] Telegram from the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968, doc. 131.

and to some extent to Rusk and Rostow as well."[62] Johnson was a consensus politician, something which has been noted by both his subordinates – such as Under Secretary of the Air Force Townsend Hoopes, who noted that, "Johnson was strongly allergic to opposition within the bosom of his official family," and by political commentators of the time such as Stanley Karnow who noted that, "the bureaucratic layer cake suited Johnson."[63] The president always looked for his advisors to be in agreement over the best course of action, particularly in Vietnam.

Overall, Tet and the difficult few weeks that followed severely damaged Johnson, his administration and the Democratic Party as a whole. According to Dallek, the president had been considering his options for some time and thought very seriously about not running for a second term in 1968. Dallek notes that Johnson ordered a "secret actuarial study" to be prepared on his life expectancy in late 1967 to assess, "his own belief that his family history made it unlikely he'd survive a second term."[64] Johnson's poll results fluctuated rapidly as a result of Tet. A Gallup poll published on 10 March had shown 49% of respondents felt that entering Vietnam was a mistake compared to 41% that did not.[65] Johnson's own job rating sat at 41% in an 18 February poll conducted during the early days of Tet.[66] This sank to 36% in a poll published on the day he announced he would not run for re-election; 31 March.[67] As noted above Johnson considered inserting the withdrawal into his State of the Union speech, but decided against it at the last minute. Dallek believes this was because "he relished the thought of beating liberal opponents, especially Kennedy, and winning vindication from voters."[68] Both Dallek and Doris Kearns note that Johnson was bullish in the lead up to his withdrawal. Johnson's address to the National Farmers' Union in Minneapolis on 17 March was a fiery defence of his position – Kearns noted that his fists pounded the lectern as he spoke.[69] This

[62] Katzenbach, *Some of it Was Fun,* pp. 274-75.
[63] S Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (London: Century, 1983) p. 403. Hoopes quoted in *The Limits of Intervention* (London: D McKay & Co, 1969), p. 90.
[64] R Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson: Portrait of a President* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 328.
[65] Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, p. 2109.
[66] Ibid., p. 2106.
[67] Ibid., p. 2113.
[68] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 330.
[69] D Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & The American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 339.

however was Johnson's propensity to mislead taking centre stage yet again; he did not want anyone beyond a few close allies to know that he was giving serious consideration to giving up the nomination. Health reasons played a part. Johnson had taken ill several times during the course of his presidency and was scared that he would become incapacitated while in office, but so did his significant slide in polls released by Gallup and Louis Harris since the beginning of the year.

There have been arguments over whether the President always planned to remove himself from office at the end of his first term; certainly he discussed the matter with his wife.[70] This was once again indicative of Johnson's credibility issues; while Johnson insisted in later years that he never intended to run in 1968, Kathleen Turner believes that even in the run up to his withdrawal, Johnson was still undecided, largely because he was a man who "prized keeping his options open."[71] Johnson's health was indeed beginning to fail, and several scares throughout his presidency caused him to take stock of the situation. In fact, Johnson's health had been steadily faltering as the demands of his presidency increased over time and several health scares did not help his own prognosis; Robert E Gilbert has noted that, "Johnson often was ill and in pain during the tumultuous years of his presidency," and this certainly affected his outlook for a second term.[72] Nevertheless, the Johnson campaign continued into New Hampshire, and therefore the question remains as to his intentions for the November election. It is important to acknowledge this discussion when looking at Johnson's media strategies; by keeping the debate over whether he should run for re-election secret, he risked returning to the reactive and belligerent strategy that helped to increase the credibility gap in the preceding years.

[70] Johnson, *A White House Diary*, pp. 642-47. A note dated "Late August, 1964" (pp. 191-92), describes a conversation between Johnson and his wife in which he discussed not taking the nomination for the previous election. Lady Bird wrote a letter to Johnson imploring him to move on with his campaign. She did not repeat this advice in 1968.
[71] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 233.
[72] R E Gilbert, "The Political Effects of Presidential Illness: The Case of Lyndon B. Johnson," *Political Psychology*, vol. 16, no. 4 (December 1995), p. 775. Johnson would die in January 1973, just as a second term in office would have ended.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the 31 March address to the nation was mentioned by Lady Bird Johnson in her diary – she noted that his speech, "was not yet firm. There were still revisions to be made and people to see."[73] Dallek believes that Johnson did not convince himself to withdraw on the afternoon of 31 March.[74] As one of the most important addresses that the President gave – six weeks after the Tet Offensive and at a critical time for the nation – the speech and indeed Johnson's own intentions were still apparently in flux just hours before its delivery. Once again, the Johnsonian speechwriting plan was to revise and edit until as close to the event as possible. A pro-active approach to media management was difficult to pull together in this sort of atmosphere; constant revisions meant constant reactions and the result was inevitably a speech that reacted to recent events rather than truly looked forward to the future. The speech itself was an impassioned plea for peace in Vietnam; Kearns notes that, "He spoke gravely, gently; gone was the undertone of sarcasm, and the appearance of piety."[75] Abigail Q McCarthy, whose husband Eugene had delivered such a blow to the Johnson administration in the New Hampshire primary, was among those who contacted the president to communicate shock, telling him, "I don't see how you could've done this."[76] However, the *New York Times* editorial summed up the shock of the announcement in a less favourable light for Johnson in the 1 April edition:

> Mr Johnson's renunciation – unexpected though it was – reflects the profound malaise that the people in every part of the country are experiencing as a direct result of the divisions over the Vietnam War, increasingly embittered race relations and a dangerously haphazard internal and external economy.[77]

This quote ultimately underscores the Johnsonian predilection for reactive media management; in his defeat Johnson was a reflection of the mood, not a trailblazer. His ultimate

[73] Johnson, *A White House Diary*, entry for 31 March 1968, p. 642.
[74] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 332.
[75] Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 348.
[76] A recording of the call between Mrs McCarthy and Johnson can be found courtesy of the Miller Center at the University of Virginia, at https://soundcloud.com/the-miller-center-at-uva/31-march-1968-johnson-and-abigail-mccarthy
[77] "I Will Not Accept," *New York Times*, 1 April 1968, p. 44.

failure to manage the media came from his administration's inability to construct a pro-active, cohesive strategy to combat negative media reports.

The embittered race relations discussed by the editorial was proven accurate three days later as Martin Luther King, Jr. – a passionate anti-Vietnam campaigner alongside the civil rights movement – was assassinated by James Earl Ray in Memphis. King's death, "both demoralized and energized the President," claims Dallek.[78] Riots across the country followed, but Johnson used the momentum gained by the murder to pass his Fair Housing Bill, signing it into law on 11 April. The malaise was deepened on 5 June, when Robert Kennedy – who entered the race for the Presidency following the New Hampshire primary results – became the second sitting senator in United States history after Huey Long of Louisiana in 1935 to be assassinated in office. Katzenbach described the feeling of "total despair" at the killing.[79] For his part, Johnson attended the funeral, but kept out of the way of the Kennedy family, and media attention was largely diverted away from him in favour of coverage of the assassination at this time. In fact, Turner notes that, "The press's attitudes toward Johnson also relaxed to a degree after his 31 March announcement."[80] This was largely down to the fact that the political candidates for the November elections would not take centre stage; for the Democrats, Vice President Humphrey, Senators McCarthy and Robert Kennedy fought for the nomination; Kennedy had taken a decisive victory in California hours before his assassination. Humphrey would gain the nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, infamous for riotous scenes that created further publicity issues, not just for Johnson, but for the Democrats as a whole. The *New York Times* headline on 29 August read, "Police Battle Demonstrators in Streets."[81] An editorial on 30 August by James Reston argued that Humphrey needed a ceasefire within the Democratic Party as much as Johnson did in Vietnam. Another editorial on the same page

[78] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 334.
[79] Katzenbach, *Some of It Was Fun*, p. 284.
[80] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 249.
[81] J A Lukas, "Police Battle Demonstrators in Streets," *New York Times*, 29 August 1968, p. 1.

decried police actions towards the newsmen and peaceful demonstrators.[82] The disarray was evident, law and order became a campaign issue, and Humphrey narrowly lost the election to Richard Nixon once America went to the polls in November.

The year 1968 ultimately saw the final demise of Johnson's administration. A rallying end to 1967 was brought crashing down by the reality of the war in Vietnam, and the Tet Offensive both eroded public confidence in the President and "drained Johnson's resources beyond endurance."[83] The administration showed several times in 1968 that they had not learned from previous mistakes, adopting reactive stances to flashpoint issues in the press. The tight-lipped stance on the *Pueblo* incident showed an inability to quickly construct a credible and cohesive public statement. The Tet Offensive, itself, brought the administration's own statements from 1967 into disrepute and turned the credibility gap into a credibility chasm. While the blame for this cannot be entirely placed on the door of the administration, there is evidence that the President and his staff knew that the war would not be won quickly, and the Tet Offensive certainly showed this to the public. Even when announcing his decision to refuse the Democratic nomination for the Presidency, Johnson continued to keep his intentions secret even from the vast majority of his advisors. While this can partially be attributed to indecision on the part of the President, and partially to the justified fear of a press leak, there can be no disputing that habitual secrecy within the administration was not conducive to a pro-active and strong strategy when it came to press relations and managing both public opinion and expectations. Jamieson feels that Johnson's rhetoric in 1968 following his withdrawal was geared at both passing on the presidency to a Democratic candidate of his choosing, and securing an acceptable end to the war in Vietnam, but believes he managed to accomplish neither of these things, noting that Johnson in fact succeeding in causing further disunity within the Democratic

[82] J Reston, "Chicago: Humphrey and the Politics of Power," *New York Times*, 30 August 1968, p. 32, and uncredited, "Mayor Daley's City."
[83] Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 331.

party.[84] This fact is arguable, as Johnson did support his vice-President Hubert Humphrey in his successful attempt to win the Democratic nomination, but ultimately, the difficulties the administration experienced in Johnson's final year can be attributed directly to the credibility gap, and led to Johnson's position becoming completely untenable in March 1968.

[84] P E Jamieson, "Seeing the Lyndon B Johnson Presidency Through the March 31, 1968, Withdrawal Speech," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 1999), p. 148.

Conclusion

This thesis has raised the argument that Lyndon Johnson's media strategy showed reactive characteristics that severely damaged his credibility with the public and with members of the press. The question that has been discussed is this:

Was Lyndon B Johnson's credibility as the president of the United States undermined by his inability to develop a strategy to reconcile his domestic and foreign policies to the American public and his administration's use of a reactive, rather than a proactive, press strategy?

By taking a chronological perspective on events, the objective has been to show the evolution of Johnsonian media relations and objectives, and indeed the lack of change that occurred over the period of his presidency. There is no question that Johnson's credibility was eroded during his time in office, and that the administration's less-than-honest line on Vietnam was a major factor. However, questions remain as to why the president and his advisory staff chose to be so misleading over the course of several years, when it was so clearly harmful to Johnson's public image. This section will reflect on the most important facets of Johnson's press strategy as discussed in the previous chapters: his relationship with the press, the administration's inability to pro-actively develop strategies to deal with important issues, particularly when dealing with the Great Society and Vietnam, the effect of Johnson's own personality on both of these points and, lastly, whether external factors ultimately had more of an impact on Johnson's credibility than the failings of his administration.

A brief final note on press relations is also needed. Over the course of his time in office, Johnson was consistently at odds with the press and this is certainly one of the important reasons for the difficulties that he faced in ensuring favourable press coverage. Kathleen Turner's study of Johnson's relationship with the press – *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War* – includes numerous examples of the president's difficulty with both individual members of the press and with the White House staff

as a whole; she describes the rocky relationship that existed between Johnson and key press correspondents even before he was elected in 1964. This did not improve as time went on; *TIME Magazine's* article describing Johnson's drink-driving antics from April 1964 was indicative of several distinctly un-presidential stories that convinced Johnson both of the need to stay – as he termed it – presidential at all speaking commitments and official engagements, and of the general untrustworthy nature of journalists. However, this attempt to remain presidential backfired on Johnson as well – his stiff style and the stilted nature of his addresses were regularly criticised by commentators. When he did change this in 1967 – during the public relations campaign mounted by the administration in the autumn – he received rave reviews from the likes of James Reston in the *New York Times*, but he could not maintain his new, more personable style and quickly retreated into the disappointing comfort of his previous appearances. Even in the post-presidency years this remained a problem for Johnson; his biographer Doris Kearns commented on the writing process of his memoirs,

> The moment a formal interview began, he stiffened; the moment it was over, he relaxed, had Lady Bird join him, and expanded colorfully on the subject he had just discussed with dull rhetoric. Yet, if we ever tried to incorporate our notes from these informal sessions into the draft, he took them out, insisting that this was a presidential memoir and had to be written in a stately fashion.[1]

This sums up Johnson's difficulty in appealing to both the press and the wider public – Randall B Woods quotes the president as saying, "What do you think this is, the tale of an uneducated cowboy? It's a presidential memoir, damn it, and I've got to come out looking like a statesman, not some backwoods politician."[2]

[1] D Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (London: Deutsch, 1976), p. 14.
[2] R B Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 881.

Ultimately, Turner notes three major reasons for the problems that Johnson had with the press. Firstly, there was a question of personal consideration – White House reporters particularly felt that, "Johnson ought to recognize the fact that they were human beings with private lives and personal needs." Then there was professional courtesy – "press conferences conducted in the Oval Office, while walking around the South Lawn or during barbecues at the LBJ ranch made it difficult for reporters to cover the president as they thought they were entitled to."[3] Finally, there were the economic concerns of media institutions who expected the administration's co-operation in their own profit-making ventures. It was easy to be critical of a president who was un-cooperative with the objectives of major news outlets. Turner's findings are not in dispute, and are supported by a multitude of influential commentators on the Johnson presidency, as well as some members of his staff in their memoirs.[4] Johnson's disregard for the media and the difficult relationship that this engendered is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the eventual deterioration of his credibility over the course of his time in office. Woods notes that Johnson left office largely estranged from the media, his taped interview with the journalist Mel Stuart summing up bad feeling fostered throughout his time in the White House: "There are people who write with great authority about the president and the presidency who have never been in this room," Johnson chided.[5]

This thesis has concurred with much of the scholarly work on Johnson's relationship with the press; he distrusted many of the more influential members of the press corps and found it difficult to do business with them. George Reedy sums this up best: "He [Johnson] regarded public discussion as dangerous to the conduct of government and looked for an operation which diverted press attention from disruptive issues and focused on his achievements."[6] His experiences with the press from his

[3] K J Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 9-11.
[4] Among others, journalist and later historian of the Vietnam War Stanley Karnow charged that Johnson increased the credibility gap with his anti-newspaper tirades in public and private, while Johnson staffer Townsend Hoopes was scathing in his memoirs about Johnson's inability to separate the personal from the political when it came to coverage. See Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (London: Century, 1983), p. 414, and Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (London: D McKay & Co, 1969), p. 240.
[5] R B Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 877.
[6] G Reedy, *Lyndon B Johnson: A Memoir* (New York: Andrews & McMeel, 1982), p. 68.

days in the Senate did him no good as the leader of the country; Johnson struggled with the increased scrutiny from the media that naturally came with the amplified visibility of the role – as Johnson's biographer Kearns notes, in the Senate during Johnson's era the important members of the press depended on face-to-face meetings, where Johnson excelled. In the office of the president, at the dawn of a new age of intense media coverage, press conferences and a less personal style were required, and Johnson could not adapt to this. He did not deal well with criticism, and this hampered his ability to react rationally to bad press; Frank Stanton, former president of the Columbia Broadcasting System and a friend of Johnson, noted in a later interview that he felt Johnson, "paid too much attention to what one correspondent wrote from the field."[7] Stanton acknowledged that Johnson was not able to set aside temporary criticism in favour of achieving his larger goals. "In the end," notes Kearns, "he was fatally vulnerable to the sound instincts of public opinion."[8]

[7] Transcript, *Frank Stanton Oral History Interview III*, 26 August 1987, M L Gillette, p. 6, Internet Copy, Lyndon B Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas [LBJ Library].
[8] Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & The American Dream*, p. 129.

Reactive Strategy

Johnson's issues with the press are important to note when looking at his reactive strategy. The original contribution to knowledge that this thesis offers is related to the ways in which this inability to deal with the press contributed to Johnson's reactive press strategy. By consistently reacting to poor press coverage, particularly from the more influential columnists such as James Reston of the *New York Times*, Johnson was unable to find a coherent manner of dealing with the hostile press, particularly on the subject of Vietnam. Because of this constant reaction, members of the administration continually found their public statements were coming second to the reporting of the press, and this led to the creation and extension of the credibility gap over the course of Johnson's presidency. Ultimately, this gap would define the Johnson presidency, and ruin his standing as a politician for the remainder of his life. The gap was the manifestation of the administration's inability to define its own strategy, and the reactive stance that it continued to take towards press and public negativity. This was noted by some of Johnson's staff – Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs James L. Greenfield noted in August 1965 that, "we are always meeting the crisis of the moment. In practice, there is little time to think about the long term or the philosophical."[9] Greenfield's comments prove that within the administration there was at least some awareness that this was an issue. Greenfield would leave office soon after this input – in March 1966 – to take up a position with the *New York Times*. Nevertheless, Johnson's attitude towards the press was not the only reason for the credibility gap, and subsequent loss of leverage.

The administration became something of an echo chamber as the siege mentality of constant defence against press criticism set in. Even in later years some staff members felt Johnson received unfair treatment from the press; Liz Carpenter remarked, "what I've always resented is [reporters] ran around keeping statistics on the number of LBJ acres, when they didn't run around [U.S. Ambassador Averell] Harriman's house or [John and Robert] Kennedy's house counting the

[9] The quote is given in its entirety in Chapter 3 (1965). Memorandum for the Record, *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. III, Vietnam, June-December 1965, doc. 105.

paintings."[10] Dean Rusk would later comment about the internal affairs of the White House, "it was my impression that there was much less dissent than the newspapers were reflecting."[11] There are numerous examples from the latter half of Johnson's time in office of influential White House staffers criticising press tactics, or opinion polls; Rusk's 1967 note complaining about the effect of the way in which opinion polls were worded was not entirely false, but was also revealing.[12] While there can be no question that the wording of a question can indeed implicitly influence the answers given, it is clear that this was a case of the administration clutching at straws while trying to react to negative public opinion reviews. Reports of White House aides sending Johnson "a nine page collection of compliments from the media since his first days in office" show even further the desperate attempts by Johnson and his staff to fight against what they perceived as an overwhelming tide of negative public opinion .[13]

The administration's withdrawal inside itself in the latter half of the presidency coincided with the most dramatic increases in the credibility gap, and the terminal slide in the president's approval ratings tracked by the major American opinion pollsters, particularly George Gallup and Louis Harris. Johnson believed that negative public opinion was shaped by negative journalism; as we have seen, there is an argument over whether or not this is the case. Karnow, an award-winning journalist in his own right, believes that journalism reflected the public view, and contradicts Johnson's theories on the role of the press as shaping and moulding opinion. The truth is somewhere in the middle. Journalism may not truly shape public opinion, but it certainly perpetuates it; in this case, critical journalism helped fuel existing public distrust of Johnson and his statements.

[10] Transcript, Elizabeth [Liz] Carpenter Oral History Interview V, 2 February 1971, by Joe B Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 21.
[11] Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 26.
[12] Rusk's comments were made on 2 November 1967; see Chapter 5.
[13] Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, p. 212.

The Johnson Personality

Throughout the secondary literature available on the president, two ideas of Lyndon Johnson become clear. One, employed by authors such as Robert Caro, sees him as a political pragmatist and ultimate politician, who bullied and cajoled and enjoyed the power he was afforded as a president who tried to bring in the Great Society more to leave his own stamp on the office than anything else. The other, employed to an extent by biographers such as Dallek and Turner, sees him as someone genuinely interested in doing good, preserving the prestige of the office and moving the country forward, who was mired in Vietnam and could not get out.

The interpretation of this thesis is that he was both of these things in equal measure. It would never have been possible for the president's advisors to truly keep his personality in check, because he was simply too mercurial. This caused issues when it came to creating a public persona for Johnson, who was not used to the spotlight of the country's press when he assumed office, and was no more comfortable with it when he left the White House.

Dealing with Johnson's views on the media was incredibly difficult for his advisors; Reedy thought that he took great delight in "newspaper and television coverage growing out of stunts," something that led to widely reported errors of judgement. These included revealing his gall bladder scar in front of a room of journalists – just one example of the myriad difficulties that Johnson's attitude brought on his press secretaries. The difficulty that he had in listening to the advice he was given by his close allies is summed up by former Assistant Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, who worked with Johnson and the Kennedy brothers, when he described Johnson's propensity for

"misremembering" facts and ideas: "Over time I became convinced that, for whatever reason, this was how he remembered it and he was not consciously lying."[14]

The question over how much Johnson allowed debate to flow within his administration has been the cause of great scholarly debate. This thesis would tend to argue against Johnson's time in office fitting the mould of what Arthur Schlesinger has described as an "Imperial Presidency," but the extent to which he invited genuine debate within his administration is certainly questionable. Johnson, himself, claimed, "I have never considered any important decision irrevocable until it has been announced and acted upon." This point is also asserted by George Reedy, who claimed in an interview that "[Johnson] had this absolute fetish about keeping his options open. If he made up his mind to appoint somebody to a job and the announcement came out before the official appointment was made, that guy lost the job."[15] If this interpretation is true, then it is easy to see why Johnson's issues with the media escalated so heavily; constantly misleading journalists, second-guessing them and avoiding the release of information until the last minute created a situation in which it was only natural that even the most staunchly pro-Johnson reporters would eventually become disgruntled at their treatment. Neil Sheehan, Chester Cooper and others have all argued, however, that Johnson simply went through the motions of debate, having already made up his mind on many important topics.[16]

The scale of the criticism that Johnson endured certainly had an effect on the president – Johnson did not deal well with criticism and generally carried the belied that any criticism of the president – especially during wartime – was tantamount to treason. This meant that he increasingly viewed the press with outright suspicion and as a consequence his government increasingly

[14] N DeB Katzenbach, *Some of It Was Fun: Working With LBJ And RFK* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 208-209.
[15] Transcript, George E Reedy Oral History Interview XXVI, 16 November 1990, by M L Gillette, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Online, p. 4.
[16] Johnson, quoted in D M Barrett, "The Mythology Surrounding Lyndon Johnson, His Advisers, and the 1965 Decision to Escalate the Vietnam War*," Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 103, no. 4 (Winter 1988-1989), p. 663.

withdrew as commitments in Vietnam increased and criticism grew. His personality did not assist him in making guided, well round decisions on how to approach press relations. For the purposes of his media communications, it seems likely that Johnson's mistrust of the press led him to make decisions, sometimes against the advice of experienced staff members who worked within the media. Stewart Alsop noted, "something he never understood: that it was a reporter's job to write what he could find out, and if he wrote it accurately it was no attack on the president. He was infuriated with the reporters for writing what he didn't want to have them write, but the government of our system doesn't work that way."[17] This did not help his ability to construct a cohesive and efficient press strategy, as he was then constantly reacting to recent stories, leaks and other events and attempting to inform his own views on how best to deal with the media at any time.

[17] Transcript, Stewart Alsop, Oral History Interview I, July 15 1969 by Paige E Mulhollan, p. 4, Online, LBJ Library.

New Technology, External Interference and Balancing Domestic and Foreign Policy

One of the most important issues in politics during the 1960s was the onset of new technology – in many ways Johnson was one of the first presidents who had to deal with an influx of media outlets and attention. Kearns has noted that, in his case, "the resources technology provides are often illusory, substituting the sense of control for real control...exaggeration of the president's personal powers…is an inevitable source of frustration as the president's actions invariably fall short of expectations, producing a destructive cycle for the man, the office, and the nation."[18] Kearns's belief was that technology could not help the president control such major issues as a foreign war and was ultimately a negative influence on the administration. Television was a newly affordable medium to millions of Americans, who were beamed harrowing images from Vietnam as Johnson's tenure went on. They listened to scathing editorials from the likes of Walter Cronkite during Tet, who Karnow called "the nation's most reliable journalistic personality."[19] It has been argued that television was not an effective marker of changing public opinion; even before the end of the war, John Mueller criticised the influence of television, noting that poll data showed that even with increased television coverage it took longer for Vietnam to dip heavily in support than the Korean War did.[20]

The findings of this thesis would tend to dispute this argument. While it is true that public opinion did not always reflect what was being shown on television, it is clear that television was an important factor, alongside the press, in changing the way in which war was reported to the public. It was no longer the prerogative of official propaganda to show what was going on in the front lines;

[18] D Kearns, "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 3 (Autumn 1976), p. 409.
[19] Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 547.
[20] J Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973), p. 167. The full quote is in the literature review.

for the first time, embedded reporters such as David Halberstam were able to show exactly what was happening and how the front line was faring. It would not be a stretch to suggest that television reporting during the Tet Offensive polarised the mood of hawks and doves, and ultimately had a hand in changing the course of the war by encouraging the likes of Walter Cronkite put forward the belief that, for the first time, Vietnam appeared to be unwinnable. With this in mind, it must be said that the Johnson administration did not adapt well to this shift in media power.

The Johnson presidency can be characterised by the difficulties of the time period that it presided over. The 1960s was a turbulent era that the most skilful political operator would have undoubtedly found troublesome. After taking over from his murdered predecessor, Johnson's time in office saw the assassinations of civil rights leaders Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr, and notably his political rival Robert Kennedy. Civil rights protests saw Johnson torn between two polarised factions of American society; on the one hand, the traditional southern white man, to whom Democrat politicians from Texas appealed and epitomised by Johnson's long-time political ally and southern conservative, Richard B. Russell (D-Georgia), and on the other, the younger generation of reformers and activists represented by King and even Malcolm X. It was inevitable that Johnson would alienate one of these diametrically opposed factions, and the president's commitment to the civil rights policies of his predecessor ensured that this was the case. Rioting increased under the Johnson administration, culminating in one of the worst inner-city riots in history in Detroit in 1967, and led to the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago being held under flashpoint circumstances. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara perhaps summed up the difficulties Johnson faced in balancing his policies in an anecdote from 1966 in his memoirs. Following Johnson's approval of an expanded troop commitment to Vietnam in July 1965, he refused to approve almost $10 billion in additional spending on Vietnam in the next fiscal year, in an attempt to preserve the Great Society. At the same time, McNamara notes, National Security aides William Bundy and Douglass Cater urged him to "educate the public… and to gain their support." Johnson refused their advice. He did not accept that criticism of the president by the likes of King placed the administration firmly within a

growing military industrial complex and furthered the idea that the president was simply a tool used to increase and prioritise military spending and development over social and economic programs. This manifested as the guns vs butter argument, wherein Johnson was forced to choose which was more important: the Great Society, or a great escalation of the Vietnam conflict. In many respects, this argument is a framing device to discuss the extent of the administration's involvement in the growing military industrial complex. It was not necessarily discussed in this manner during Johnson's time in office, but is certainly substantiated by King's belief of dealing with domestic matters over a foreign war.[21] McNamara believed that Johnson "felt trapped between two bitter choices: subterfuge versus the twin dangers of escalatory pressure and the loss of his social programs."[22] McNamara's urging to educate the public would have certainly mitigated some of the criticisms that Johnson elicited in later years, especially the credibility gap. Jacobs and Shapiro agree with this summary: "Manipulative use of information asymmetries, as occurred during Vietnam, invariably results in inflated expectations. In contrast, full and honest discussions by policy makers can lower public expectations and force citizens to weigh competing considerations…something that the Vietnam War called for."[23] The problems that Johnson faced in domestic society were partly of his own making, as he funnelled funds that were verbally promised to his Great Society programmes into the war, but there can be no doubt that the difficulty of the political landscape in the 1960s also hampered him greatly, particularly the racial climate of the United States.

Johnson's own medical issues also hampered him, both in terms of press reaction to his health scares and whether or not he would be healthy enough to seek the Democratic nomination

[21] King noted in his "Beyond Vietnam" speech; "There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I have been waging in America… It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the Poverty Program…Then came the build-up in Vietnam and I watched this program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war," He also notes that he was compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to "attack it as such." For more information, see Dr. M L King Jr., Beyond Vietnam, April 4 1967, Riverside Church, New York City, full transcript accessed at http://www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_king01.html.

[22] McNamara relates this story in his memoir, R McNamara with B Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 205-206.

[23] L R Jacobs and R Y Shapiro, "Lyndon Johnson, Vietnam, and Public Opinion: Rethinking Realist Theory of Leadership*," Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3 (September 1999), p. 615.

for the 1968 elections. Gilbert notes that Johnson's health was bad enough during his time in office to necessitate cover-ups that were participated in by medical staff, to avoid publication – one more example of the president's propensity for misleading the public, albeit one that proved necessary to avoid public panic so soon after the death in office of an American president.[24] By early 1968, Lady Bird Johnson's diary spoke of the Johnson family and their concerns over Lyndon's continuing health: "he feels older and more tired than he did ten years ago, or five years ago. And what of the next five years? Suppose he runs and wins? Would he be able to carry the load in a way that… the country deserves?"[25] Indeed, arguments have been made that Johnson's health was the direct reason for his withdrawal, rather than the credibility gap and mounting crises both domestically and abroad. Johnson, himself, made this argument in his post-presidential work, *The Vantage Point.*[26]

This thesis does not argue that Johnson's mounting medical issues were a significant factor on his decision to withdraw, and there is other evidence within the diary of Lady Bird Johnson that this is the case. We have seen that Johnson's personality was such that he may well have been tempted to continue in the election even as his chances of winning dwindled. Instead, the driving argument being made here must be that regardless of the reasons Johnson gave for his decision, the president's credibility had been eroded too far to have a realistic hope of victory and that this was due to his inability to preside over a strong and proactive media strategy.

[24] On Gilbert's study into Johnson's medical issues, in which he concludes that Johnson was a "tormented" leader, see R E Gilbert, "The Political Effects of Presidential Illness: The Case of Lyndon B Johnson," *Political Psychology*, vol. 16, no. 4 (December 1995), pp. 761-76.
[25] Lady Bird Johnson (C T Johnson), *A White House Diary* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 612
[26] In his partial memoir, Johnson discussed his decision to withdraw: e.g., Chapter 22, "Headlines and History," in Lyndon B Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Henry Holt, 1971), p. 532 and passim.

Summary

Lyndon Johnson's presidency saw a great shift in the balance of domestic politics in the United States. While there was great merit to many of his domestic aspirations the erosion of his own credibility damaged the standing of the Democratic Party and ensured that the Republicans swept back into office in 1968. The Democrats saw only one president – Jimmy Carter – elected between 1968 and 1992 following Johnson's presidency and four of the subsequent five presidents were Republicans; Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. The failure of the Great Society and subsequent inflation crisis caused in part by spending on domestic concerns and Vietnam were influential on a general upswing in conservatism, and although it should not be argued that the Johnson administration was wholly responsible for this, there is at least some evidence to suggest that a grassroots rise in conservatism happened under Johnson's watch.[27] The legacy of the administration was to usher in an era of suspicion and mistrust of the presidency, which would ultimately culminate in the Watergate Scandal under his successor Nixon.

Robert Dallek perhaps best summed up the Johnson presidency when he said, "Whatever impulse future historians may have to pigeonhole Johnson as a near great, average, or failed President, I am confident that a close review of his time in office will leave them reluctant to put a single stamp on his term."[28] This is certainly true. Johnson is incredibly difficult to categorise as a president, with possibly the best description of his immediate legacy coming from *Newsweek* columnist Charles Roberts, following his death in 1973:

> He leaves office a man whose epitaph will some day defy the confines of even a Texas-size tombstone: the most militant civil-rights advocate ever to occupy the White House,

[27] The hard core of conservatism can be seen in the results of the 1964 election when compared to 1968 – while Johnson ultimately won the race against Barry Goldwater with ease, the base of Goldwater's Republican support would grow in subsequent years until it gained parity with the more liberal Democratic party in 1968, and far surpassed it in 1972.
[28] R Dallek, *Lyndon B Johnson*, p. 377.

> reviled by negro militants; a Southerner scorned by Southerners as a turncoat; a liberal despised by liberals despite the fact he achieved most of what they sought for thirty years; a friend of education rejected by intellectuals; a compromiser who could not compromise a war ten thousand miles away; a consensus-seeker who in the clutch abandoned his consensus rather than his convictions; a power hungry partisan politician who, in the end, shunned power and partisanship to achieve national unity.[29]

There is no question that Lyndon Johnson is an important president, and his achievements with Medicare, civil rights legislation and anti-poverty acts were monumental. His influence on the presidency and politics in the years following his time in office should not be underestimated. What he was not however, was a man who could use the press to his advantage. Johnson presided over an era of changing attitudes and a more open and technologically advanced press than had existed in America prior to the 1960s. As we have seen, he consistently showed a short-term, reactive strategy toward dealing with press coverage and sliding approval ratings, and with each reaction and each ill-thought-out response to political problems, he created further issues for himself as his presidency went on. This was evident in his planning for the 1964 election, when he positioned himself as the anti-war candidate against Barry Goldwater's hard-line views, even while he knew that escalation in Vietnam was assured. It was apparent in 1965, when James Greenfield criticised the administration for only meeting the crisis of the moment and not looking further ahead. It was clear in 1966, when the press openly reported on the credibility gap between Johnson and the people. By the time the administration took note and conducted what might be termed as a public relations offensive in late 1967, it was too late. In their assessments of how well the country was doing, they failed to look forward and see what reports already told them; the Tet Offensive of January 1968 was already being foreshadowed by enemy actions. Tet shattered the goodwill that Johnson earned with his

[29] *Newsweek* obituary, quoted by Clark Clifford in *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 385. On Johnson's obituaries and their content, see E W Chester, "Lyndon Baines Johnson, an American 'King Lear': A Critical Evaluation of His Newspaper Obituaries," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 319-31.

most pro-active strategy, and permanently ruined his credibility with the American people. While there is undoubtedly an argument to be made that external circumstances and the political volatility of the 1960s had an effect on how pro-active the president could be in his press dealings, the administration failed to effectively organise a strategy to propagandise the policies of the presidency and ultimately that failure lay chiefly with Lyndon B Johnson, himself.

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